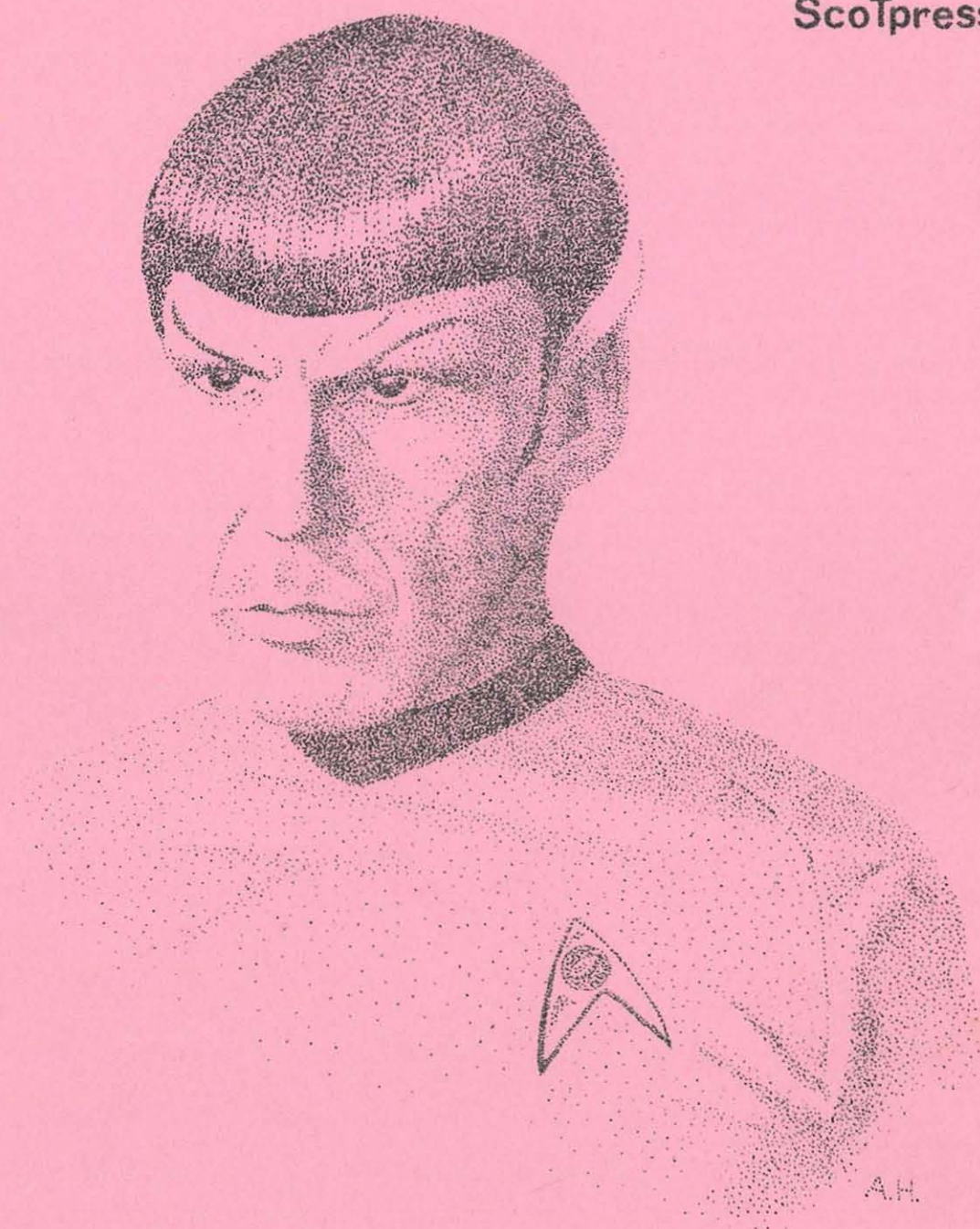


ScoTpress



ENTERPRISE -

LOG ENTRIES

a STAR TREK
fanzine

47

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February 1982

ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona.

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 47.

When discussing our printing schedule for 1982, we realised that August would bring us to Issue 50. We also realised that no STAR TREK zine has reached this number, in either Britain or America. We have therefore decided to make this a special anniversary issue.

Several contributions have already been earmarked for this, and for once we are not limiting the length, but will allow it to be the length it wants to be. There will also be more illustrations than usual.

So far we have contributions by Meg Wright, Crystal Ann Taylor, Ellen Kobrin, Sue Meek, Lee Owers, Ann Preece, Vicki Richards, Sheryl Peterson, Gillian Catchpole, Ann Smith, and others.

As well as artwork by our regular and valued artists Anne Humphrey, Martin Delaney and Virginia Lee Smith, we have also been promised contributions by Gayle Feyrer, Barbara Gordon, and a cover by Lee Sullivan.

We are aiming for August publication, although due to the length of the zine it may be nearer the end of the month than the beginning. (Sheila's Chain Gang has gone into strict training to cope with the collating.)

We will, of course, also have our customary one-off out in August.

For those of you who have asked about Variations 7, work has begun on it, although we are not at this stage planning to print it until sometime during 1983. We are also considering a prequel to the Variations series following the careers of Kirk and both Spocks prior to the events recounted in Variations 1. Whether we go ahead with this will depend on the amount of interest shown in it by you, our readers.

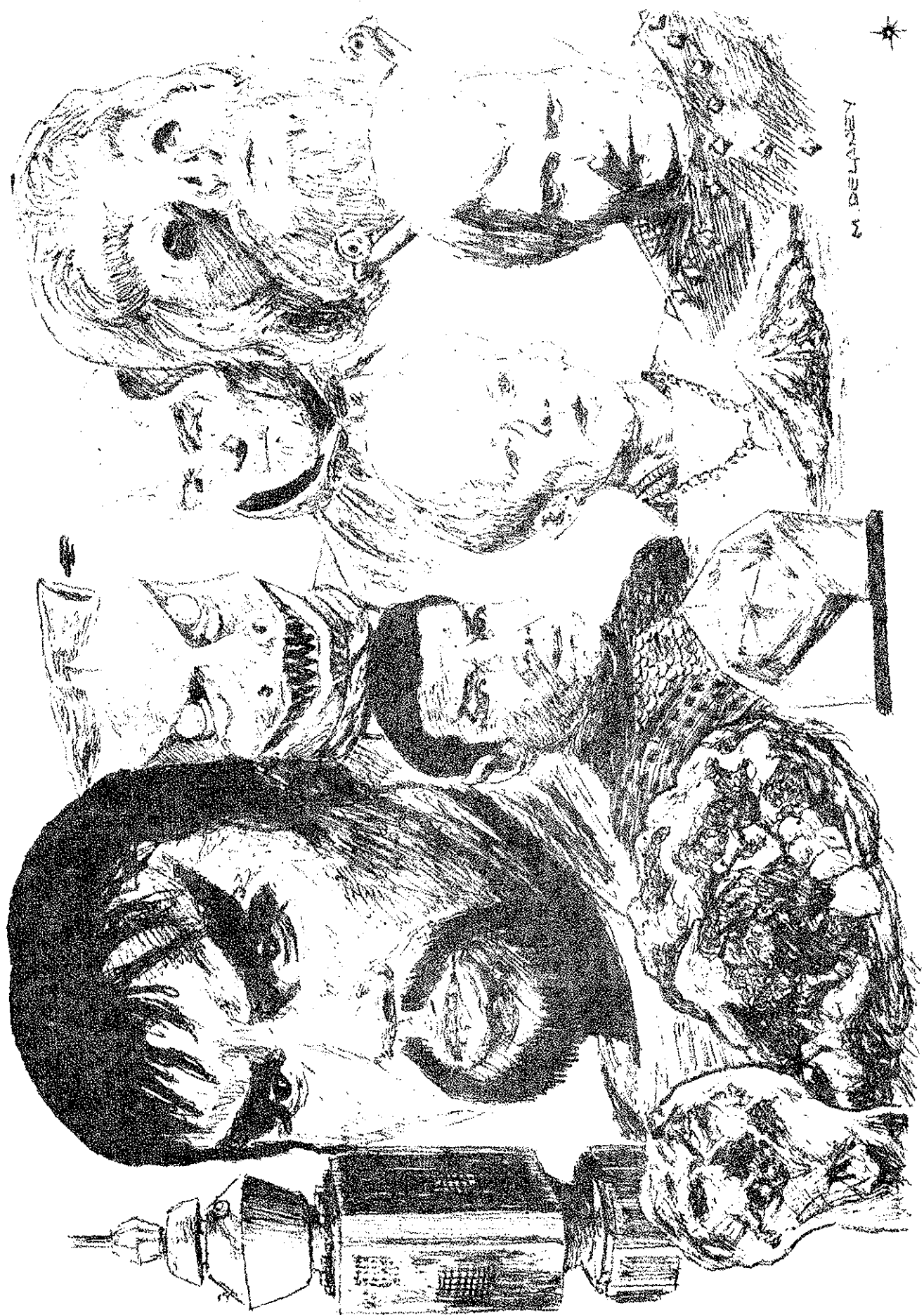
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WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART by Elizabeth Butler

Was this really happening? Surely not! It was a nightmare, and he would wake up soon - wouldn't he? It didn't feel like a nightmare. It was all too horrifyingly real, and he knew in his heart that this particular nightmare, which had tormented him for years, was in fact stark reality.

Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer of the USS Enterprise, was just one of the small group of anguished officers waiting helplessly in the transporter room. He still couldn't believe it.

A purely chance encounter, this tiny star system had one planet which looked as if it might support life. Sensor probes had revealed a breathable atmosphere and some form of animal life. Always on the alert for habitable planets, suitable for colonisation, Kirk had organised a landing party for a brief survey. Purely routine; the sort of thing they had undertaken dozens of times before. No problem! The very words Kirk had used just before beamdown, heralding, as on so many similar occasions - disaster!

The first reports were encouraging. The planet was completely uninhabited by any intelligent life, and climate and vegetation were similar to Earth's sub-tropical zone. All in all, a world just waiting for colonisation.

Then, a few minutes ago, Kirk had called in to inform them that they'd sighted a large animal which warranted further investigation, if the Federation intended sending survey parties.

The subsequent alarm from the Security guard was shattering. The creature they had been pursuing, a large ape-like animal, had led them to the edge of a sheer precipice. Without warning, it had turned and attacked them. Taken completely unawares, the landing party had hesitated momentarily before firing their phasers, and in that split second the creature had seized Kirk and thrown him over the edge of the cliff to be dashed against the rocks far, far below.

Scotty stood by agitatedly while Spock painstakingly aligned the transporter signal to home on Kirk's communicator. With slow deliberation he moved the levers, and the familiar sparkle appeared.

McCoy stood transfixed as Kirk's broken body materialised on the transporter platform. As if in a dream, he saw Spock hurry over and drop to his knees at Kirk's side.

The dream-like state persisted as he heard Spock calling to him as if from a great distance. He couldn't move - he wanted to - he knew Jim needed him desperately - but he couldn't move a muscle. He was rooted to the spot in horror, painfully aware of four pairs of eyes, looking to him as if for a miracle.

And it would take a miracle this time, he thought confusedly. No-one could have survived that fall. Jim's luck had at last run out.

Dimly, he realised that someone was gripping his shoulders, shaking him urgently. His eyes focussed with difficulty on - Spock! But Spock was over on the platform with Jim. He couldn't be in two places at once...

McCoy looked past Spock's shoulder to where Uhura and Christine Chapel knelt either side of Kirk. Christine was making a supreme effort to remain calmly professional as she ran a mediscanner over Jim's body, while Uhura, tears streaming unchecked down her cheeks, cradled his head in her lap.

"Doctor!"

The voice was calmly commanding. He knew he ought to respond to it, but his eyes remained glued to the tableau on the transporter platform.

"Bones! Snap out of it! Please! Jim needs you."

The naked anguish in Spock's voice finally penetrated through the fog surrounding McCoy's mind. He raised his eyes to meet Spock's, and to his intense dismay felt the sting of bitter tears. Dashing a hand across his eyes he twisted out of the Vulcan's grasp and hurried over to Kirk.

An aura of icy detachment enveloped him, only the faintest tremor of the hand holding the mediscanner betraying his inner turmoil. As his brain assimilated the full extent of Kirk's injuries, he was barking orders to the medical team standing by. Within minutes Kirk was lifted carefully onto the trolley, and the medical team directed their footsteps towards the turbolift and Sickbay.

When Uhura made as if to follow, Spock gently gripped her arm and held her back. She swung to face him, heedless of the tears still streaming down her face.

"Please, Spock, let me go. Please! I have to go with them."

"No, Lieutenant. There is nothing you can do."

"I know that!" she almost shouted. "I just know I want to be with him. Don't you understand?"

Spock looked down at her, seeing his own grief and anguish mirrored in her eyes. He spoke very softly.

"Yes, Uhura. I understand, believe me. I understand."

Uhura gazed at him, comprehension dawning. Of course he understood. He, of all people, understood her devotion to her Captain. They were kindred spirits, drawn together by their mutual love for James Kirk.

On a sudden impulse, she flung her arms around his neck. Spock stood immobile for a few seconds, then his powerful arms encircled her and held her close, giving and receiving the comfort they both needed so desperately.

Neither noticed the silent departure of Scotty, who had stood unobtrusively in the background during the exchange, unwilling to make his presence known.

Down in Sickbay McCoy and Chapel were painstakingly working on the seemingly impossible task set before them. After the initial examination on reaching Sickbay, they'd just stared at each other in stunned disbelief.

"Where in hell do we start?" muttered McCoy helplessly. He gave himself a mental shake. "Come on, McCoy," he admonished himself savagely. "This is no time to panic. Jim's relying on you. Spock too."

Obviously the internal injuries would have to be attended to first. Broken bones could wait.

"Okay, Christine. Better get him prepared for surgery. We'd better see to that left lung first. One of the ribs has punctured it."

Having decided on a course of action, medical training reasserted itself, and the job was soon well under way.

Whilest McCoy and Chapel fought the battle to save Kirk's life, the atmosphere on the mighty starship was strangely subdued. News travels fast in an enclosed environment, especially bad news. Four hundred and thirty people, from the lowliest yeoman to the highest echelons, waited with baited breath for news of their Captain. In the dining room and rec rooms, crewmen and officers sat in small groups engaged in idle conversation, eyes repeatedly drawn to the wall communicators.

On the Bridge, silence reigned absolute. Scotty still sat in the command chair, which he had assumed after leaving Spock and Uhura in the transporter room. He had attempted to hand over to Spock on his return a few minutes ago,

but had been waved back by the First Officer, who now sat at his own console seemingly engaged in checking sensors.

No-one was deceived. They all knew Spock well enough by now; knew that beneath the impassive mask he always wore, he felt things just as much as they did - sometimes, as now, even more.

Sulu and Chekov exchanged glances and looked across at Uhura in mute enquiry. She slowly shook her head, gazed across at Spock for a moment, then turned to her board.

Routine took over as the Bridge, along with the rest of the ship, settled down to wait.

After what seemed an eternity McCoy slowly straightened his aching back and surveyed his patient. Kirk was breathing shallowly, but regularly. It had been a long, hard battle, and they were by no means out of the wood yet. The combination of Kirk's stamina and McCoy's skill had, yet again, averted tragedy.

The internal injuries were not quite as bad as McCoy had at first feared, the splintered rib ripping the left lung being the worst. Both legs had been broken, but the bones had now been knitted together by laser, and the legs strapped to facilitate healing.

McCoy turned wearily to the wall communicator. "Sickbay to Bridge."

The reply came instantly. "Spock here. Go ahead, Doctor."

McCoy took a deep breath to steady his voice and continued, "Jim's come through surgery okay. It's too early to tell whether he'll make it or not, but he's tough, or he wouldn't have come this far. That fall would have killed most people instantly. For a few minutes there, I really thought..." He broke off abruptly, suddenly unable to continue that train of thought. "Anyway, you can come down and see him for a few minutes if you like, Spock."

Up on the Bridge, Spock gripped the edge of his console where he'd answered the doctor's call, and stood with eyes closed for several long seconds. Sulu, Chekov, Uhura and Scotty sat frozen to their seats, all eyes on Spock, hardly daring to breathe.

McCoy's anxious voice shattered the stillness. "Spock! You still there? Did you hear what I said?"

Spock pulled himself together with a visible effort. "Yes, Doctor. I'm still here. I shall be down presently."

"Another thing, Spock. I think you ought to make an announcement to the crew. Jim's still got a long way to go, but they'll want to know he's still with us."

"Of course, Doctor. I intended doing just that." There was a slight pause, then, "And... Bones... Thank you."

The simple, quiet words were almost too much for McCoy. He couldn't trust himself to make any reply, and flipped off the communicator.

Seconds later, as he again stood looking down at Kirk's pale features, he heard Spock's voice over the intra-ship communications network.

"This is First Officer Spock. I have just been informed by Dr. McCoy that Captain Kirk has successfully undergone surgery. That is all I can tell you at this time. I realise how... anxious... you all must be feeling, and I will, of course, convey any further reports as soon as I receive them. Spock out."

McCoy smiled to himself. "Careful, Spock! Your humanity's showing."

Christine Chapel caught the smile and looked at McCoy questioningly.

"It's okay, Chris. I was just thinking about our Vulcan friend. You know, I think we'll make a Human of him one of these days."

It was Christine's turn to smile, a little wistfully. "Oh, I hope not. He wouldn't be Spock then."

A little surprised, McCoy reflected on her response, then nodded his head slowly. "I guess you're right. Spock is Spock, and I don't suppose any of us would have it any other way."

Before the topic could be pursued any further, the door to Sickbay swooshed open and the subject of the conversation entered. As Christine tactfully departed Spock moved to the opposite side of Kirk's bed and looked down on the face of his commanding officer.

He looked so pale and vulnerable lying there, the familiar lock of hair falling over his closed eyes. Spock reached out, acutely conscious of the doctor's presence. After the briefest of hesitations he completed the movement, smoothing back the stray lock of hair. Looking up, he met McCoy's concerned gaze.

"Doctor, please tell me the truth. I must know. Will he live?"

McCoy spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness. "Spock, I don't know. I wish with all my heart I could say, 'Yes, of course he's going to live'. Believe me, nothing would give me greater pleasure. But I can't. I honestly don't know. The surgery was successful, as far as it goes, but his whole system's had one helluva shock. There's no skull fracture, but he's got a lump the size of an egg on the back of his head. I'm reasonably sure there's no brain damage, but there again, until he regains consciousness I can't be sure."

He paused as a flicker of pain crossed Spock's features, then continued gently, "We've done all we can possibly do. It's up to him now. We can only wait."

As Spock stood, unmoving, his hand still resting lightly on Kirk's hair, McCoy felt a momentary surge of the panic that had assailed him in the transporter room. Had he done everything possible? Was there, even now, something he had overlooked? Both Jim and Spock trusted him implicitly. He couldn't bear the thought of letting either of them down.

As if sensing the treacherous doubts in the doctor's mind, Spock moved round the bed to his side, laying a hand on his arm.

"Forgive me, Bones. I know you have done everything that could possibly be done. I'm afraid that at times we all expect miracles from you."

The unexpected gentleness of Spock's tone brought tears to McCoy's eyes for the second time that day. "Do you want to stay with him for a few minutes?" he asked brusquely, to break the tension.

"Nooo..." Spock answered slowly. "I think I would be better employed looking after the ship for him. I would, however, appreciate your allowing someone else to see him."

McCoy looked up doubtfully. "I'm not so sure about that. I made an exception in your case, but I don't want every Tom, Dick and Harry traipsing down here."

Spock raised an eyebrow and quietly remarked, "I would hardly call Lt. Uhura every Tom, Dick and Harry."

McCoy nodded in sudden understanding, somewhat surprised at Spock's insight. For someone who professed not to experience or understand Human emotions, he seemed to have an amazing ability to recognise them in others.

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry. For some strange reason I hadn't even thought of Uhura. By all means, send her down."

"Thank you, Doctor." With a last look at his unconscious Captain, Spock turned and left Sickbay.

The next few days passed with agonising slowness. The regular bulletins from Sickbay were becoming monotonous.

"No change." "Holding his own."

McCoy was becoming increasingly concerned, though he masked it carefully. Jim still showed no sign of returning consciousness, although encephalograph readings revealed highly agitated brainwaves. After carefully studying the readings yet again, he crossed to the wall communicator.

"Sickbay to Bridge."

"Bridge here. What can I do for ye, Len?"

"Scotty? Where's Spock?"

"In his quarters, I imagine. And not before time, if ye ask me. He's spent three solid days on this Bridge, except for his visits to Sickbay. Ah'm no doctor, but even I ken a person can't go on for ever wi'oot rest. Even a Vulcan! If he's no' careful, I'm thinking you'll be having two patients in yon Sickbay."

McCoy passed a worried hand over his chin as he considered. If, as Scotty assumed, Spock had at last gone to rest, should he disturb him? Would a few hours matter so much?

Scotty's anxious voice roused him from his reverie as he realised with a start that he'd been standing with the communicator open, lost in thought.

"Len! Len, is something wrong? The Captain..."

"No, no, Scotty," McCoy hastily reassured him. "I just wanted a word with Spock. It can wait."

He drifted over to Kirk's bedside and checked the readings above his head. They were all slowly returning to normal as his injuries healed. Why hadn't he regained consciousness? He was fairly certain there was no physical damage to the brain, so why in hell didn't he wake up? He flipped the switch to study the encephalograph again. Was it his fevered imagination, or were those ominous peaks even more pronounced?

"It's getting worse, isn't it?"

He hadn't heard Christine's approach, and looked at her distractedly.

"I said, it's getting worse," she repeated softly. "Whatever's eating away at his mind."

Her words struck a chill through McCoy's heart, and he came to a sudden decision.

"Stay with him, Chris. I won't be long."

Spock lay down on his bed and tried to relax. He knew he ought to. He owed it to Jim to remain at peak efficiency - to look after the ship until he was able to take over.

If he was able to take over again!

Spock flung the thought from him savagely. He must not allow himself to consider such a possibility. Of course he would soon be fit enough to resume command! He had to be! Hadn't McCoy assured him his injuries were progressing satisfactorily?

//Then why hasn't he regained consciousness?// a voice inside his head seemed to ask.

He sat up abruptly, acknowledging the fact that there was no way in which he could relax while his closest friend still lay unconscious. Maybe there was some way he could reach him...

He swung his feet to the floor and made towards the door, only to be brought up short as his buzzer sounded. No-one ever came to his quarters, save Kirk. And, of course, McCoy!

He quickly activated the release, and the doctor almost fell into the room.

"I wasn't sure whether to disturb you when Scotty said you'd come down to rest. Obviously I didn't."

Spock searched McCoy's face apprehensively. "No, Doctor, you didn't. I found I couldn't rest, so I was just on my way to Sickbay."

Flinging caution to the winds - McCoy could always see through him anyway - he gripped the doctor's shoulders. "Doctor - what are you doing here? Is it Jim? He's not...?"

"Take it easy, Spock," urged McCoy, covering Spock's hands with his own. "Let's sit down for a minute. I want to talk to you. Please?"

Reluctantly Spock complied, moving round his desk to sit in the chair. Perching on the edge of the desk, McCoy sat for a moment collecting his thoughts, then met Spock's gaze unflinchingly.

"I won't mince words. I'm worried. The surgery was a complete success, and all the readings are slowly returning to normal. But he should have regained consciousness by now. He hasn't - and I don't know why. Spock, I need your help."

"My help, Doctor?"

McCoy nodded. "I've been running some encephalographs, and his brainwaves are highly erratic. I can't find any physical cause. He seems to be caught in some kind of nightmare from which he can't escape. I thought, maybe, you could try to reach into his mind. Find out what's tormenting him, and maybe help him out of it." He paused, searching for the right words. "I know you're reluctant to intrude into another person's mind without their knowledge and consent, but in this case, I'm begging you to try. I don't know what else to do. I know Jim would..."

"Please, Doctor. There is no need to go on. Of course I will do what I can. I had already decided to try to contact Jim. That is why I was on my way to Sickbay when you arrived."

The two men locked gazes, complete understanding and trust between them. Wordlessly, Spock rose and moved to join McCoy.

"Shall we go?"

McCoy stood, an unwilling but necessary spectator, at the foot of the bed, whilst Spock attempted to reach Kirk. Spock had asked, and McCoy had understood. If anything went wrong, someone had to be there to intervene, to help Spock break the contact before he too became hopelessly entangled in Jim's nightmare world.

Spock sat on the side of the bed and reached out till his fingers touched Kirk's temple. With his free hand he lifted Kirk's hand and raised it to the same position on his own face.

McCoy looked on, scarcely breathing, feeling completely helpless as his two closest friends fought for the sanity of one of them. What was it someone had once said? 'Waiting is the hardest part.' My God, they didn't realise how right they were! It seemed that was all they'd done for days now. Wait. Wait and pray.

Spock's breathing was becoming ragged and irregular. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, and his normally impassive features took on an expression of abject fear and horror as he sank deeper and deeper into his friend's tortured mind, living his nightmare with him...

... He was falling! Slowly, inexorably, falling. He could see the top of the cliff from which he had been flung by the creature. It didn't seem to be getting any further away, but he knew he was falling. He felt the wind flowing past his body, gently buffeting him, and all the while the edge of that cliff remained constant in his vision.

And the scene which met his eyes struck horror into his very soul. Spock was standing on the very edge, obviously seeking a way down to him, completely oblivious of the huge ape-like creature advancing menacingly towards him.

He tried to shout a warning, but his voice was snatched away by the wind. And all the while the creature moved nearer and nearer, to hurl the unsuspecting Vulcan after him.

He closed his eyes in an effort to shut out the nightmare vision, but that served only to heighten his terror for his friend, and he was compelled to open them again, to be confronted by the same horrific scene.

No, not quite the same scene. As he opened his eyes the creature seemed just a little further back, only to move purposefully forward again. Nearer and nearer... Again he tried desperately to warn Spock of the impending danger - to no avail. As the creature reached out for Spock, he once more closed his eyes in sheer terror.

And yet again the scene played itself out before his horrified eyes. And again, and again, never ending, always the same, and every time the creature came just that fraction closer, Spock's danger more acute.

Dear God, would it never end? He was trapped, his terror mounting steadily. His heart and mind desperately cried out to Spock. Please, God, let him hear me! Please!!

The ape-creature was directly behind the Vulcan, reaching out with claw-like hands. He made a last despairing effort to warn his friend. Spock seemed to tense. Had he managed to reach him?

As the creature lunged forward, Spock ducked swiftly and rolled out of its path. With a roar of fury, the ape hurtled forward and over the cliff, plummeting past him to be dashed against the rocks below.

He sobbed with relief and inner joy as Spock's face appeared over the edge, and miraculously he felt his hand being grasped, felt himself being pulled up, up and over the top of the cliff, into the waiting arms of the one man in the universe who meant more to him than life itself...

... McCoy hovered anxiously, unsure whether to intervene or not. Small whimpering sounds were issuing from Spock's lips, and his eyes were closed, slow tears forcing their way from under the lids to trickle down his cheeks.

The doctor took a hesitant step forward, then stopped abruptly as Kirk cried out just one word.

"Spock!"

He stood transfixed as Jim struggled up, clutching at Spock, sobs wracking his body.

Spock opened his eyes, breaking the mental contact, and instinctively gathered the trembling body into his arms, holding him as a father would a frightened child, a gentle hand stroking his hair. Over Jim's head the two men's eyes met, McCoy's asking an unspoken question, and, almost imperceptibly, Spock nodded his head, the faintest hint of a smile touching his lips.

McCoy let out his breath in a long sigh of sheer relief, and murmured huskily, "I'll... leave you for a while... till he calms down. Then I'll come and check him out."

He entered his office and leaned back against the door, his knees suddenly weak with reaction. The scene he had just witnessed had affected him deeply, and he felt a great joy in his heart that Spock had trusted him enough, had cared enough, to let him be a witness. He knew he was probably the only person in the universe - save the man who now found peace in the arms of his dearest friend - who had ever seen Spock with all his defences down. He felt a pang of... not jealousy... more envy... of the bond which tied those two so closely together.

Alone, each man was held in awe, commanding respect in his own way, but together they were truly unique, two halves of a whole, a true marriage of souls.

And McCoy was proud to be their satellite, revolving forever in close orbit, apart, yet forever joined to both.

How long he stood there he had no idea, but he was suddenly jolted back to reality by a light tap on the door behind him.

Spock looked completely drained, but quietly triumphant. "He's sleeping now. I... would be grsteful if you would confirm that he is no longer in danger."

McCoy nodded wordlessly and followed Spock back to Jim's bedside. Kirk lay, eyes closed, a slight smile curving his lips.

The doctor flipped the switch and watched the gentle curves and peaks of the encephalograph for a minute or two. He looked up and smiled, for the first time in days.

"Perfectly normal sleep patterns. He should wake in a few hours, and the rest of the readings are back to normal. He's going to be okay. Thanks to you."

Spock inclined his head gravely. "It is true I was able to reach his mind and pull him back. But that would have been to no avail if you had not first restored his body."

A companionable silence fell between them, then McCoy asked quietly, "Will he remember?"

"To a degree, yes. The fear is no longer there, but he will remember the events that caused the fear." Slowly, he related the essence of Kirk's nightmare to the doctor, his voice faltering slightly as he neared the end, and his own part in it.

"Poor Jim," whispered McCoy. "He ~~must~~ have gone through hell. Four days he's been unconscious. Surely he hasn't suffered that for four days! It doesn't bear thinking about."

Spock swayed suddenly, and McCoy was at his side in an instant. He helped him to a chair and knelt before him, holding his arms.

"Spock, you need to rest. Scotty told me you've not slept for over three days, and the meld with Jim has taken a great deal more out of you. You must rest. That's an order!"

Spock took several deep breaths with eyes closed, then pulled himself erect and faced McCoy.

"There is something I must do first." He held up a restraining hand as the doctor was about to protest. "It won't take long. Then, I promise, I will go to my quarters and rest. On one condition."

McCoy leaned back on his heels and dropped his hands to Spock's wrists, gripping gently. "I promise, I'll call you personally when Jim shows signs of waking."

Spock turned his hands and grasped McCoy's wrists with an answering pressure for an instant, then he rose and left Sickbay without a backward glance.

All eyes looked to him expectantly as he stepped from the turbolift onto the Bridge. Scotty half-rose from the command chair, but resumed his seat as Spock moved purposefully towards Uhura's station.

"Lieutenant, give me shipwide communication, please."

"Yes, sir." Uhura glanced at him apprehensively, but he gave no sign of having noticed. Holding the channel open, he paused for a moment, considering his words carefully.

"This is First Officer Spock. I have just returned from Sickbay, where Dr. McCoy has confirmed that Captain Kirk is now out of danger. I - and I'm sure Captain Kirk - would like to thank you all for your concern over the past few days. It will, of course, be some time before the Captain will be fit enough to resume command of the ship, but at least we can all rest assured that he is well on the way to recovery. Spock out."

At the conclusion of the announcement the whole starship seemed to erupt with joy. The very walls reverberated to the sounds of cheers and back-slapping as over four hundred people gave vent to the pent-up emotions of four days of waiting.

On the Bridge, the scene was no different as Sulu and Chekov leaped from their seats to hug each other in glee and pound Scotty's back enthusiastically. As Spock released the board to Uhura she caught his hands and reached up to kiss his cheek. The others looked on in amusement as Spock stepped hastily back to regard her quizzically, both eyebrows on the rise.

"Really, Lieutenant! I realise you are merely expressing your great relief at the Captain's recovery, but please attempt to control yourself."

"Of course, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I don't know what came over me," apologised Uhura, grinning from ear to ear.

Spock continued to regard her for a few seconds, then, as much to his own surprise as to that of the assembled audience, he felt himself smiling in return. Quickly realising what he was doing, he turned to Scotty, his mask firmly back in position.

"Mr. Scott, I am going to my quarters. I do not wish to be disturbed for anything less than a Klingon attack." He inclined his head slightly. "Is that understood?"

"Aye, sir. Perfectly," beamed Scotty. "Ye'll no' be disturbed. I'll see to that."

Four pairs of eyes followed him to the turbolift, and he turned to face them before entering. He allowed his gaze to rest momentarily on each person, then, looking directly at Uhura, said softly,

"Thank you."

As the elevator doors closed in front of him, the other three turned to Uhura curiously - and all gathered round her as she sat sobbing uncontrollably.

"I'm... all... right," she managed to jerk out between sobs. "It's... just the relief." She managed to smile at them through her tears, and Scotty nodded understandingly, his mind flashing back to the scene he had been witness to in the transporter room on the day of the accident.

He grinned at her, and swung her to her feet. "Come on, lassie! This is no time for crying! We should be celebrating. The Captain's going to be just fine. That's what we've all been waiting for, isn't it?"

"Yes, Scotty, that's what we've all been waiting for." She hugged him fiercely, then turned to Sulu and Chekov, flinging her arms round each in turn. The mood on the Bridge changed rapidly from sentimentality to joyful exuberance, along with that of the rest of the ship.

Sickbay was a quiet haven in a ship gone mad. McCoy made a last check of the readings above Kirk's bed. Satisfied that all was well, he left him in Nurse Chapel's capable hands, while he departed for a well-earned rest, leaving strict instructions that he was to be informed the very second that Jim showed any sign of waking. He meant to keep his promise to Spock, that he would personally call him when that time came.

Their turn to celebrate would come later - when Jim woke up.

VISIONS by Ann Smith

Darkness - complete, utter darkness and the sounds of silence. Always the silence, smothering. Insidious waves of nothingness, strangling, extinguishing life - and through the darkness floating, on a dark-night sea, visions...

... a deep yawning chasm and the slow drip, drip, drip of life's blood ebbing away into emptiness. Falling in slow motion into the depths to be born again, a flickering of flame...

... green fire...

... the ancient words of Kor... incantation, echoing darkness... with each drop of life another forgotten word spoken, calling forth...

... green fire...

... the stone of Kordan - reflecting... the milky whiteness of eternity dissolving to amber glow... burning... with the intensity of laced flame...

... green fire...

... forever, one burning...

... green fire...

... life's blood flowing to darkness, complete, utter darkness and silence... and always...

... green fire...

Kt'suma withdrew her gaze from the mirror pool... Always was the vision thus. From the yr'ling of her life it had not changed, and still the meaning remained a mystery. Even the 'Old One' could not fathom its secret. The stone of Kordan existed - set in a pillar of ebony at the very edge of Pendar, the chasm of death - but the ancient words of Kor were long forgotten by her people; no record of them had existed for many m'llena. A legend was told in the ancient writings that the stone of Kordan held the secret 'Changer of Time', and that the words of Kor would activate it, erecting a spacial bridge between 'this time' and the 'time of others' - but it was only legend. The words of Kor were long gone, and no-one would know if they, in truth, ever existed.

That was another mystery to Kt'suma. The words were a part of the vision, yet they did not remain - they slipped from her memory like rain from moots leaves and vanished beneath the waters of the mirror pool. Strange! That she could remember the vision fully, except for the words of Kor.

She shivered slightly as the evening breeze ruffled her hair. So many years! Why tonight should the vision bring apprehension? Her eyes were drawn to the purple night sky, and the stars which shone there, and another shiver coursed through her body.

Was it the wind, or her own lips, that whispered?

... green fire...

* * *

Captain James T. Kirk sighed and shifted restlessly. This mission was definitely jinxed; nothing had gone right from the start. First Bones, and the accident in Sickbay. What the hell was he doing with a vial of Sarrgellieun flu virus anyway? And why did he have to drop the damn thing - infecting half the crew?

Then the explosion in the cargo hold - at least no-one had been hurt in that little fiasco!

Next had come the ion storm, and real trouble.

And now - now they were orbiting Kordan, a nice, safe(?) uninhabited class M planet, licking their wounds, and he hoped to God they got the repairs

finished before anything else happened.

Spock's appearance at his elbow broke his reverie, and he smiled up at his First Officer.

"Anything interesting down there, Spock?"

"There appears to be a ruined city to the west, Captain."

"Worth taking a look?"

The Vulcan nodded. "Further investigation may be worthwhile. It would be interesting to know what kind of culture existed on this world. The previous survey was very brief."

"Come on then," Kirk smiled. "A spot of sight-seeing is just what the doctor ordered."

"What's just what the doctor ordered?" McCoy enquired, stepping out of the turbolift to hear the tail-end of the remark.

"Sight-seeing, Bones. Spock's found a ruined city... Coming?"

"You bet!" McCoy grinned at them. "If I let you two loose on your own down there, heaven knows what scrape you'll get yourselves into."

"Doctor, may I remind you that it was YOU who had the accident with the Sarrgellieun flu virus which effectively immobilised 65.2% of the crew." Spock cocked an eyebrow at the doctor's reddening face.

"All right, Spock! No need to rub it in," McCoy grumbled testily. "Accidents happen."

"So I noticed, Doctor," came the cool reply.

McCoy turned an angry stare on the Vulcan and opened his mouth to protest.

"Knock it off, you two," laughed Kirk. "We're none of us perfect."

"Some of us think they're more perfect than others," McCoy muttered under his breath as he followed his two friends.

At the turbo, Kirk turned. "You have the Con, Mr. Sulu."

Ten minutes later three figures shimmered into being on the planet's surface. There was a moment's disorientation, the after-effects of scrambling one's molecules, and then three pairs of eyes were scanning the landscape with interest and appreciation.

The ruined city lay spread before them, cradled in the arms of the emerald hills. A wonderland of columns, archways and domes reflecting a pale green light. Creepers in varying shades from evergreen to mint covered the crumbling facades and tumbled columns, effectively softening the harshness of decay. Flowers similar to large orchids bloomed among the creepers, bright drops of blood on a sea of green. Highways which had once reverberated to the noise and bustle of a thriving community now echoed softly to the twitter of birds and the chirrup of insects. The moss covering the ancient stones muffled the footsteps of the three men as they walked in silence, drinking in the peace and beauty of the forgotten world around them.

After three hours of lazy exploration two tired but relaxed Humans and one 'fascinated' Vulcan began to retrace their steps to the beamup point via the outskirts of the city.

"It's like an underwater world without the water," exclaimed McCoy, waving his hands around indicating the emerald, jade and apple-green hues on every side. "Whoever built this place sure had a penchant for green."

"Obviously an aesthetic race," Spock stated. "I find the colours conducive to relaxation and coolness."

"Humph... You would," Bones retorted.

"I'd hardly call these flowers cool and relaxing, Spock," Kirk chimed in, pointing. "Blood-red isn't my idea of a peaceful colour."

"Agreed, Captain. They are, however, pleasing to the eye."

"Remind you of Vulcan, eh?" enquired McCoy. "Never seen such a 'bloody' planet."

"Indeed, Doctor!"

Kirk smiled at his two friends affectionately. Did they really think they were fooling anybody with these battles of words? A very real affection existed between them, only he doubted that he would ever get either of them to come out and openly admit it. He chuckled inwardly. 'Chalk and cheese.' Bones, the crusty-coated, warm-hearted cynic prone to emotionalism; and Spock... Spock, who hid his Human care and understanding beneath the cool, logical control of Vulcan. Yet despite their differences they had found a peculiar kind of friendship, and he had no doubt at all of the value they both placed on that friendship.

He was brought back to the present by McCoy's excited voice.

"Hey! Jim boy... come and look at this mosaic! It's positively pornographic!" He pointed to the illustrations covering the inner wall of a partly ruined circular building.

Kirk wandered over and peered curiously at the figures scattered in wild abandon.

"Spock should see this, Jim. I'm sure he'd find it 'fascinating' - besides, it might teach him a thing or two," McCoy chuckled evilly.

"Don't you dare, Bones! You know how embarrassed he gets over anything to do with sex."

"That's what I mean. Broaden his outlook a bit." He turned towards the roadway intending to call the First Officer in to look at his find, but Spock had wandered off. "Oh well!" he sighed, "I don't suppose he'd have appreciated them anyway."

"Never mind, Bones, I appreciate them."

"Good thing too," the doctor retorted.

The Vulcan's voice calling, "Captain!" took them to the doorway. Spock was some distance away, gazing up at the hillside.

"What is it, Spock?" Kirk called, heading in the direction of his friend.

"There appears to be a cave in the hillside," Spock explained, pointing to a dark area about halfway up the slope.

"Let's go take a look, then. Come on, Bones... Bones!" Kirk turned back to the circular building. "Bones!! Come on... it's not THAT interesting."

"Want a bet?" McCoy exclaimed, emerging once more. "Jim, there are positions depicted in there that I didn't even know existed... and I've been around." His face was a picture of lecherous wonder.

A raised eyebrow from Spock, and Kirk's laughter, were his only answer.

A short climb up stone steps hewn from the hillside itself brought them to the opening. A vast cavern stretched away into dimness. Sunlight spilling through the cave mouth etched weird patterns on a triangular pillar, enhancing the opalescent stone set high in the flat face. Carvings of similar scenes to those depicted in the mosaic covered the walls.

Spock eyed the pillar with interest and moved to inspect it. Close observation revealed that the pillar was, in fact, cut from a single piece of wood



similar to the genus *Diosphyres Obenum* found in Southern India, Earth. However, here the ebony darkness had an amber as well as a dark olive tinge. The oval gem, if such it was, set high in the flat face of the triangle resembled a *Ns'killiane* glow stone - a milky iridescence reflecting the rays of sunshine as golden shards of light. The whole stood on a slightly raised platform at the edge of a chasm. Beyond, darkness reigned complete for, as though stopped by an invisible shield, no light penetrated beyond the monolith. Spock stepped cautiously onto the platform and gazed out into black nothingness.

While Spock was engaged in scrutinising the triangular column, and McCoy in leering over the intricate scenes carved on the walls, the Captain was busy inspecting the cavern floor. Just as Spock stepped up onto the platform he was in the act of reading aloud some half-obliterated words. A sudden wave of fear hit him, and instinctively he leaped forward shouting, "Spock, no!"

Even as the Vulcan turned a wine-dark stain appeared through the stone above his head, and his outline began to shimmer. In a desperate bid to reach his friend Kirk leaped up onto the platform, and before McCoy's horrified gaze they both disappeared.

The first thing Spock became aware of was the sound of blood pounding in his ears. His head felt as if it were being squeezed by a steel band. All sensation seemed concentrated in his skull. He tried opening his eyes, but the assault of vivid colours on his senses made him close them again. Even with the lids tightly shut the colours seeped through into his brain. 'In the distant recesses of his mind a small voice echoed, 'Calm... logic... control... calm...' but the words had no meaning. They skipped though his thoughts light as thistle-down, and where they touched emotion sprang, gathering momentum, building to a tidal wave which crashed through his body, churning his stomach until it rose in a rushing bid for freedom, and with a gasp he turned on his side and was violently sick. The spasm left him weak and shaking, but at least the pressure in his head had eased slightly.

From far away a voice reached him. "Spock... take it easy now... you're safe..."

//Try to concentrate... the words... hurts...//

"Come on... lean on me, Spock..." the voice echoed.

//Spock? Was he Spock? Must concentrate... familiar... NO!! It hurts... NO!... Please...//

And he was tumbling, falling away into blackness.

Jim Kirk also regained consciousness to the accompaniment of a churning stomach and the grand-daddy of all heads. He groaned and lay still until the thumping in his skull died to a barely tolerable level and his stomach recovered its equilibrium, then cautiously he eased himself to a sitting position. Even then, the movement caused the world to spin crazily, and he hastily shut his eyes for a moment.

On opening them again, he very slowly surveyed his surroundings. Nothing seemed to have changed. He was still in the cavern, and Spock...

Spock? Where was Spock? A too-sudden movement made him groan again as he got unsteadily to his feet, frantically searching with his eyes. His breath released in a sigh of relief when he saw his friend at the other side of the pillar.

However, concern replaced all other feelings as he noted the pallor of the curled, shaking figure. With unsteady steps he crossed the short distance between them, and sinking to his knees gently gathered Spock into his arms and carefully wiped his face, words of comfort tumbling unconsciously from his lips. The lean frame shuddered against him, then lapsed into unconsciousness.

Heedless of his own shaking limbs and pounding head, Kirk carefully lifted Spock into his arms and headed for the cave entrance. Only then did a vague thread of thought penetrate.

Where was Bones? Bones?

But the thought was gone. He shook his head slightly to clear it - an avalanche of fiery light exploded in his brain, and a flood of blackness swept him away, instinctively clutching his precious burden.

* * *

Kt'suma knelt beside the mirror pool and gazed into the lightening sky. The vision had changed - subtly altered - yet remained the same. Her brow creased into a frown as she reconstructed the vision in her mind, tentatively searching for the shades of difference.

There - her mind pounced - it was the darkness that was wrong! Complete, utter darkness - only now the utter darkness had coalesced to form a dark star - a dark star and an amber glow, faint but unmistakable, and the silence was full of shadows.

For a long time she knelt watching the mauve clouds sweeping across the sky before the rising sun. A pale, slim figure beside the dark waters. Thoughts tumbled over one another. What did it mean? Why should the vision change now? After so many years?

Apprehension drew a cold veil around her heart. The time was approaching.

* * *

Softness enveloped Kirk and he stretched slowly in the cool comfort. Sounds and smells percolated through hazy senses and his mind awoke. Mentally he explored his body - he seemed to be intact, a few painful bruises, and his limbs felt stiff and sore, but otherwise intact. Even the multitude of hammers pounding in his head seemed to have died to a dull ache.

Cautiously he opened his eyes. Sunlight filtered into the room through an archway beyond which could be seen only a lime-tinted shimmer. He lay in bed in a small cubicle; no other item disturbed the bareness. The walls were of the same pale-green stone they had seen in the city...

The city? Yes... that was it. They'd been exploring Kordan... The events replayed in his mind's eye, up to...? He'd been carrying Spock... then falling... Where was he? This sure as hell wasn't Sickbay! And Spock... Where was Spock? Must find him... must...

He struggled to a sitting position and swung his legs over the side of the bed. Just as he gained his rather unsteady feet a figure appeared in the doorway.

"My friend, you must rest. Recovery is not yet complete." Concern coloured the old man's voice.

"Where am I... and who are you?" asked Kirk as he reluctantly sank down on the bed.

"I am Tolaare, the 'Old One'," came the calm reply.

"Spock! What have you done with Spock?" Kirk's voice was suddenly agitated.

"Peace... the strange one sleeps in the next room. He will recover."

Kirk sighed and relaxed perceptibly. Now he knew Spock was safe he could concentrate his attention on Tolaare. Humanoid in appearance, tall and extremely thin, he seemed frail, ancient, yet strength radiated from him like warmth from a fire. Dressed simply in a green robe, he was nevertheless an impressive sight.

"Where is this place?" Kirk asked, indicating the room and beyond.

"You are in the sanctuary of the 'Old One' in the city of Kordan in the Time That Is."

A puzzled frown creased Kirk's brow. "The Time That Is?" he queried.

Tolaare smiled slightly, "For you, I believe it is the Time That Was. Am I not right? You were found beneath the cave entrance. Did not the stone of Kordan, the Changer of Time, bring you here?"

Captain Kirk was not renowned for his slow thinking, and now his mind worked overtime. Vaguely he remembered glimpsing cultivated fields and figures herding a flock of queer-looking animals before the darkness overtook him. And their Kordan had been overgrown and uninhabited.

So! It was possible that they had somehow come through some sort of time gate into the past (although how they'd activated it, he couldn't for the life of him think at the moment.) And Bones...

He looked up. "Bones? Er... the healer?" he asked.

The 'Old One' regarded him with puzzled eyes. "The healer? I do not understand. You are only two."

In that case, Kirk figured, Bones must still be in their own time - he hoped. Which meant that he and Spock were going to need Tolaare's help in returning.

Coming to a decision, he returned his gaze to the patiently waiting figure.

"I am Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise."

"From the Time Which Will Be." It was more a statement than a question.

"Yes... Well, at least, I think so," Kirk replied.

"And the strange one?" Tolaare asked calmly.

Kirk smiled slightly at the term used to describe his friend. "My First Officer, Commander Spock."

"He is not of your race?"

The smile broadened. "No, he is a Vulcan - and a friend." Now why had he stressed that?

A head nodded thoughtfully. "You are honoured, Captain. I have heard of the Vulcan race. They do not give their friendship lightly... and rarely to aliens."

"Mr. Spock's mother is Human."

Tolaare nodded again. "Interesting... a hybrid!"

Somehow Kirk felt embarrassed at discussing his First Officer in this way, and quickly changed the subject.

"You mentioned a Changer of Time. Is it some sort of time gate?"

"The description is adequate. The ancient writings tell us that to speak the words of Kor activates the stone of Kordan, thus forming a bridge between the Time That Is and the Time That Will Be. Our ancient ancestors called it the Changer of Time."

"Then to return we only have to reactivate the stone?"

"I regret, Captain, that cannot be."

A pair of hazel eyes regarded him suspiciously. "Why?"

"My friend..." Tolaare paused, and there was sadness in his eyes, "... the words of Kor have been lost to my people for m'llena now. We cannot return you."

"But surely the words are in the ancient writings somewhere?" Exasperation and anxiety reflected in Kirk's voice. Why in the name of all creation couldn't things work out simply for a change?

The 'Old One' shook his head. "We have searched our world for m'llena now. The ancient writings are regarded by many as merely legend... only the seers of visions still truly believe... and even the visions do not reveal the words of Kor." He did not mention that there was one who saw the words, for wisdom bade him keep silent... the time was not yet.

Kirk had been deep in thought while Tolaare was speaking, listening with only half an ear. Something niggled at the back of his mind, something that didn't quite correspond with what he was being told... but what? He cast his mind back to the moments before...

That was it! The words... he'd been reading some half obliterated words... and Spock... Spock had been standing on the platform beneath the stone. The words of Kor?

"You lie," he stated angrily. "The words of Kor are written on the cavern floor."

Tolaare looked at him with unfathomable eyes. He seemed to retreat into himself, and the words were more expression of thought than a statement.

"The cavern floor is bare... but... if in the Time That Will Be the words are known... then... the vision has meaning..."

"What vision? How can the floor be bare? I read..." The questions tumbled over one another - this was getting him nowhere.

"Peace, Captain. Tomorrow I will show you the truth of my words. I will leave you now. I have much to consider." He turned to leave, but paused in the doorway. "Rest now... your friend will have need of you when he wakes." And with that he was gone, slipping silently into the haze beyond the doorway.

Kirk sank back on the pillows, suddenly realising how tired he was. The pain in his head was starting to nag again, and there was so much to think about, so many questions without answers.

Suddenly he chuckled to himself as sleep tugged at his senses. They'd done it again - got themselves into a scrape. Some chaperone Bones had turned

turned out to be! They'd never live it down... if, of course, they ever got back to their own time. The thought sobered him.

* * *

While the Enterprise officers slept Tolaare meditated on the new path which was opening up before him. A veil was slowly lifting from his inner sight, and little by little the meaning of the vision was becoming clearer. Kt'suma herself had sensed the time was drawing near... already dark star and amber glow... but could one who appeared so cold bring forth... green fire? Only the flowing of time would tell.

* * *

Spock had been out cold now for ten hours, and anxiously watching his friend's aple, sweat-damp face, Kirk admitted to himself that he was worried. If only Bones were here! Tolaare had said that Spock was sleeping, and would recover, but... could he be trusted?

//Damn it, Bones, why couldn't you...? Stop it! Wishful thinking isn't going to help Spock. Be logical... Logic! Fat lot of good that is at a time like this! Patience, now...//

A faint movement from the bed brought him abruptly back to earth. Gently he smoothed the damp hair.

"Spock?"

... The word touched him in his darkness, but it did not call to him. It was the voice which called, and in this dark and lonely place he longed with all his being to reach out... touch... the warmth it held; but he was trapped, lost in the blackness. Strange visions weaved within his mind, curling and uncurling, ghosts of his other-self, searching, always searching... lost, lonely ... aching in every fibre of his existence.

... A tiny light... in the darkness... glowing. He shrank away from its brightness, cowering in the shadows, afraid, and yet at the same time longing to reach out, to draw the light to him, drown in its glow. He was torn... repelled but attracted... wanting yet denying... at war within himself. His soul trembled, shaken by an invisible wind that howled through his consciousness, tearing at the light with hungry fingers. It flickered, hesitant... bending before the wind as a candle flame... but it did not die. The glow remained... growing brighter... reaching out to him with gentleness, dissolving fear... seeping into the cold void.

Tentatively he felt himself responding, unfurling outwards, whispering for acceptance, warming himself in the glow...

BEWARE! The old-self is waiting... watching from the shadows... Guard the light... shield it... for the old-self would destroy. Keep silent vigil, or the warmth is lost... lost beyond imagining, and you are nothing again...

... The visions twisted and danced, taunting him, laughing at his need. Scorning his yearning, whispering of dark voids, cold nothingness... heartless. He shrank from them, crying out his dread of their living death... wanting with all his heart to know... amber glow... join... become green fire...

... Green fire... dimming to soft jade shimmer, amber fading above him. Soft against his skin... feeling... awareness of body... aching. A touch cool against his burning... he was real...

"Spock?"

He responded to the touch, opening heavy eyes to drown in hazel light.

"Spock?" The anxiety in the gaze dimmed slightly and a gentle smile dawned. "Welcome back..."

He lay still, gathering strength, basking in the warm presence.

"How do you feel?"

"I am... functional." His mouth curved up in a slight smile as he carefully scrutinised the man who now sat on the side of his bed. "And you, Jim?" he asked softly.

"I'm okay. A few aches and pains, but nothing serious. It's you I'm worried about. You've been out for nearly ten hours... Sure you're okay?"

Spock nodded. "I feel a little weak, but that is all." He looked around him with interest. "Where are we?"

Kirk gave him a quick run-down of events up to the present, together with his theory about the time gate and the strange words of Tolaare.

"I'm not altogether sure I trust this Tolaare," he stated finally. "All this talk of visions and legends, and the cavern floor being bare... I saw those words, Spock... damn it all, I was reading the blasted things when...!" He shuddered, and shook his head.

"The visions I do not at present understand, Captain, but in my experience, every legend has its own grain of truth."

Kirk sighed. "Yeah, you're probably right, Spock. Tolaare said he'd take us to the cavern tomorrow, so perhaps we'll find out more then. In the meantime, I suggest we get some rest - you look worn out, my friend."

"I must confess, I am very tired."

The words brought a slight frown to Kirk's forehead. It wasn't like Spock to admit to any form of weakness, even to him. However, all he said was,

"It's a good job Bones isn't here, or he'd be tucking you in."

An eyebrow disappeared into the dark hair. "I fail to see why he would wish to 'tuck me in' - if he were here," Spock stated, adding as an afterthought, "Not that I would let him."

A pair of mischievous eyes laughed at him across the room. "Oh, you know how he loves to mother us."

"I can assure you, Captain, I do NOT need mothering," came an indignant response from the bed.

A devilish grin suddenly appeared on Kirk's face as he advanced quickly across the room and deftly tucked his startled First Officer in.

"Jim! I..." he protested.

"Don't you?" came the soft reply.

For a moment hazel and dark eyes met. Now why had he said that? Spock didn't need mothering, he needed...? Loving! he finished the thought.

"Jim?"

Mentally Kirk shook himself. His transition through time must have upset him more than he'd thought. Aloud, he said, "Insurance... if I don't get you back all in one piece, Bones will be after my hide." He walked swiftly to the door.

"Goodnight, Jim."

"Goodnight." And with a smile he was gone.

Spock settled himself for sleep. An illogical thing to do... tuck him in... and he did not need mothering... yet... from this man it was very acceptable. He suddenly felt safe and warm, and snuggling deeper beneath the covers, he slept.

Captain's Log - Stardate: Unknown.

"We have been stranded in Kordan's past

now for nearly fourteen of their days. Tolaare has been most open with us, and assisted us in every possible way. A visit to the cave did in fact confirm that there is no writing on this cavern floor - a discrepancy with our Kordan which neither Commander Spock nor I can explain. We have been allowed to study the ancient writings, but they have given us no clues as to how to return to our own time.

They tell only of an ancient legend - that the stone of Kordan, which stands on the edge of Pendar, is the key to a Changer of Time, which the Commander and I have deduced to be a reference to a time portal of some sort linking the past with the future. The writings state that the words of Kor, when spoken, activate the stone, thus opening the time gate. However, the actual words do not appear in any of the manuscripts so far studied, and Tolaare informs us that no such record of them has existed in Kordan for hundreds of years.

One of the oldest manuscripts states that those who erected the Changer of Time were 'Beings unlike us, from beyond the farthest star.' How or why they came is not mentioned. However, from what little information we have gleaned from the writings, it would appear that somewhere along the line something went wrong, and time was altered, changing the future of this world. There is a vague reference to the words of Kor, and 'two who will become one'. Unfortunately most of this manuscript has been destroyed by the ravages of time, leaving only patchy references. It is unlikely that we will ever know who or what these 'beings' were.

The Kordanians themselves appear to be a simple, peace-loving people. Primitive forms of machinery are in evidence, but there seems to be no great thirst for knowledge of a mechanical kind. Rather, they concentrate on beauty, harmony, peace, and living close to the land. There is an inhibition which is somehow childlike. In fact, the population seems to be rather small, Kordan being the only city. Tolaare, or the Old One, as he is sometimes called, appears to be a combination of city mayor and mystic. He and his daughter Kt'suma are 'seers of visions'. These visions are translated to foretell the future, and if the ancient records are accurate, then there is some truth in them.

Tomorrow Tolaare is to take us some distance from the city to visit what he calls a 'mirror pool'. From what I can gather it is in the depths of these pools that the visions are seen. He seems to think we may obtain some useful information there, but I am somewhat doubtful."

It sounded ridiculous - visions seen in a pool - but was it? He wasn't too sure any more. Since they had been here he had constantly been troubled by dreams of darkness, and a twisting amber light laced with green fire. Some instinct kept telling him that these dreams were somehow connected with their presence in Kordan and their return home, but what that connection was, he hadn't the faintest idea.

Another thing that vaguely worried him was that he felt sure that Spock was having the dreams too. He hadn't said anything, but unconsciously he seemed to be drawing back into his shell... his Vulcan was showing to a more marked degree ... and it worried Kirk, because that usually meant that his friend was troubled.

Kirk sighed and switched off the tricorder. It seemed 'illogical' somehow, making a report that was unlikely to be heard.

//No!// He mentally shook himself. //Think positively - Jim Kirk, you're going home. Where there's a will there's a way - and by God we're going to find it.// He smiled slightly at his reflection in the garden pond by which he sat. //Nothing like giving yourself a good talking-to, eh?//

The reflection smiled back, and broadened as another face appeared in the water beside him.

"Hi, Spock," he said, turning to glance up at his friend. "Find anything in those old books Tolaare brought?"

Spock shook his head. "Nothing that is not already stated elsewhere. The words of Kor appear to be the key..."

"... and those elusive words are what we haven't got," Kirk finished for him.

"Indeed, Captain. However, I... ah..." He hesitated, half embarrassed.

"Go on."

"I have a... a..." He seemed to be fumbling for words.

"Feeling," Kirk supplied for him, cocking his head questioningly.

"Ah... yes, Captain... I... sense... that Tolaare is not being absolutely honest with us when he says the words of Kor are lost..."

"But we've searched the records, Spock. Anyway, why should he lie to us? What reason could he have?"

"I do not think he lies when he states that there is no written record, but..." He hesitated again, even more embarrassed. "I... feel... the words are known - by someone."

Kirk considered his First Officer's words for a moment in silence, then on instinct asked, "You're having strange dreams as well, aren't you, Spock?"

"Yes," came the murmured reply.

"Darkness, amber glow, green fire?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Then for some reason we're both having the same kind of dreams, and I have a feeling that somehow they're connected with our getting home."

Spock remained silent, and Kirk glanced at him curiously - there was something he wasn't being told here, and that wasn't like Spock. Not like him at all.

"Any idea what the dreams mean, Spock?" he asked aloud.

"No, Captain, none. Perhaps tomorrow will give us more information. I myself find belief in visions illogical - however, there is evidence that on this world such visions have meaning, and seem to foretell the future, to some extent. Therefore, I will reserve judgement until tomorrow."

"I hope so, Spock. Heaven knows what's happening to the Enterprise while we're stuck here. Besides, to be quite honest with you, I desperately want to go home. Beautiful as this world is, and however well we're treated, I... Dammit, I miss the Enterprise like hell!" He held up his hand as Spock opened his mouth to speak.

"I know, I know... It's not 'logical' to miss a hunk of metal - but I do, and I miss Bones and Scotty and the rest of the crew..."

"I understand, Jim... I too want to go home..." There was a strange note in Spock's voice that he'd never heard before... a wistfulness?

He jumped up from his seat by the pool and stretched. "Come on, let's get something to eat." He glanced down at his stomach and patted it lovingly. "Hell, with the food we get around here, if we don't go home soon I'll never dare to go back and face Bones - he'll have me on a diet of fresh air and love for weeks."

"Illogical, Jim, even for Dr. McCoy to suggest," Spock stated, following him into the coolness of the buildings. "One cannot live on fresh air and love."

"No," agreed Kirk, "but you can't survive without them either."

Silence was his only answer.

That night the dream came again, calling to him through the dark void. A warm amber glow beckoning, offering... and he was reaching... stretching with

all his being towards the light, longing to float in the warm amber pool... liquid gold laced with sunshine... dissolving. Let it melt him away... kindling his soul with flame... buring to green fire.

NO!!!

Suddenly there was blood... slow motion droplets falling through the void. Vermillion stains against the darkness... falling, falling... A rain of death forming a curtain between himself and all his heart and soul desired, cutting him off from the warmth which was his life... Flinging him back into emptiness...

Laughter echoed around him... his Old-Self taunting... daring him to take, reach out... stain his hands with the crimson life. Deny all he believed in... for love... and he shrank from the hateful voice which was himself... closed his eyes against the flowing curtain... When he opened them again he was alone ... alone in a blackness he could feel... lost...

... Spock awake, trembling, his heart pounding. He felt the wetness of tears on his cheeks. He did not fully understand the dream, but... he knew what his heart desired... and it frightened him.

* * *

Today...

Kt'suma shivered in the morning breeze. Today Tolaare was to bring the strangers to the mirror pool. The time was drawing near. Ever since the strangers had appeared below the cavern the vision had subtly altered.

Tolaare had said that one was tall and dark, with pointed ears and pale-green skin, and the coolness of Cr'ev, the ice mountain; and the other fair haired and golden, with the warmth of love and laughter.

Amber glow and dark star? Could the coldness of Cr'ev produce green fire? She herself doubted it, but if the vision was thus, it had to be so. And now... today... they would come; she would meet them... and she would know.

A breeze ruffled the emerald creepers at her feet as she stood watching the hillside road. Soon they would come... Soon...

The sun was riding high in the sky when at last the little group of figures appeared over the crest of the hill. Silently Kt'suma watched them approach, growing larger with each passing moment, filling her eyes, reflecting the visions. The time was now...

"My daughter." Tolaare's soft voice echoed through her thoughts. Slowly her eyes cleared, and she smiled at the old man.

"I have brought the strangers, my child." Turning to his two companions he introduced them. "Captain Kirk... Commander Spock."

Jim Kirk's smile came up like the summer sun, and the hazel eyes beamed into twin azure pools.

Kt'suma returned the smile. //Assuredly amber glow,// she thought, turning her clear gaze to the slim, dark figure at his side.

The eyes that met hers so coolly were as dark as the night and as deep as the vision pool itself. A shiver ran through her frame. //This is indeed dark star and the ice of Cr'ev.//

Her eyes dropped before the blackness. "Commander."

"Madam." The voice was deep and calm, echoing the void.

"Come." Tolaare turned and led the way through a grove of trees to the edge of an expanse of shimmering water.

Kirk glanced into the depths then, startled, looked up at the clear amethyst sky above.

"Spock! The reflection!"



"Indeed, Captain. Fascinating."

Kirk glanced at his friend in exasperation. "It's... it's..."

"Beautiful," Kt'suma finished for him.

Smiling, Kirk spread his hands to indicate the pool, and then the sky above. "But why? How? I mean..."

"Why does the pool reflect the night sky?" Tolaare replied. "I do not know... it has always been so. Always the waters are dark and shimmer with falling light."

"It is right... that it should be thus," Kt'suma added softly. "It is the vision pool."

"And what type of visions are conjured up from these dark depths?" a cool voice enquired at her elbow.

Unconsciously the slim figure straightened and the head lifted proudly as she turned to meet the penetrating gaze, and quietly dropped her bombshell.

"The visions conjured in those dark depths, Commander, are your only hope of ever returning to your own time."

If she had been hoping to shake Spock she was disappointed. The dark eyes never wavered from her face.

"Explain," he demanded coldly.

"Spock!" Kirk's voice broke between them. Turning, he said, "I think explanations are in order, Tolaare."

Tolaare inclined his head gravely. "I regret the deception, Captain. It was necessary until we were certain that you are, in fact, part of the vision."

"Then we can return to our own time?" Kirk demanded, hope rising like a tide.

"I do not know."

"But you said..." Frustration echoed in his voice. They seemed to do nothing but talk round in circles.

"The words of Kor are in the visions." Spock's calm statement brought his Captain's eyes to his face.

"Of course..." He rounded on Tolaare, anger shaking him like a desert wind. "You lied - you said the words were lost."

A sigh escaped the old man, and he shook his head sadly. "No, Captain, I did not lie. Kt'suma sees the words in the vision, in that Commander Spock is correct... However, the words do not remain in her memory."

Anger still smouldered. "Look... I think it's about time you levelled with us. Just what is this... this vision - and translated into terms we can understand, what exactly does it mean?"

Tolaare indicated a stone bench at the side of the pool. When they were all seated, Kirk demanded, "Well?"

Kt'suma gazed into the dark waters at her feet and slowly began. "There is darkness. A darkness more empty than space would be without the stars... a great chasm of yearning, beneath, above, around, enveloping. An amber glow appears, soaking up the darkness as the morning sun gathers up the shadows of the night. Calling to the dark star through the void, and the drops of blood are as ruby light falling away to nothingness between them.

"Dark star fears the vermillion curtain, fears to pass through to the light, to stain with life's blood the cold of loneliness. Still the warmth calls... flowing through the depths, and where the crimson teardrops touch and melt away is born a flickering flame.

"Through the silence, echoing, the words of Kor. Incantation... with each drop of falling life, another word... flooding the stone of Kordan... milky whiteness melting... spreading amber glow... a slow burning flame laced... green fire... one..."

Her voice faded into stillness...

... and the stillness washed over Spock, setting his nerves tingling. Reality seemed to fade around him, leaving only the water, velvet darkness full of shimmering light, reflecting... his dream/vision.

And he knew in that instant that he was dark star, and the key to the future lay within him... his love... which was both strength and weakness. For now and all eternity he must conquer his old-self... reach through the ruby curtain for

the warmth of light... or be lost forever.

Fear chilled his soul, twined icy fingers around his heart, but the battle had to be fought, for their return home depended on it; and if he lost - if at the last minute his other-self rose up against him - then amber glow would be extinguished. Jim would die, and his soul would be stained with blood.

A shudder ran through him, and as if from far away he heard his name being called. With an effort he pulled his mind back to reality and the present.

"You okay?" Concern reverberated through the words, and the amber in his mind grew brighter.

"Spock... are you all right?"

Mentally, he shook himself. "Yes."

"Good. For a moment there I wondered... You were miles away."

"Jim,.. There is something I would like to discuss with you when we return."

Dark eyes locked with hazel, and what Kirk saw there made him shiver. Never in all the years he had known Spock had those dark depths ever revealed such naked emotion. Everything was not all right, something was tearing his friend apart - and the sooner he found out what, the better.

Now, however, was neither the time nor the place. He gratefully accepted Tolaare's suggestion that they return to the city. The journey was made in silence, each keeping his own council.

The return journey had been a time for thinking - about the Vulcan, his dream/Spock's dream, and their connection. The conclusion he had reached was that they were all one. Somehow he and Spock were a key to the vision - dark star and amber glow... and their oneness.

He remembered reading about oneness in an ancient manuscript Sarek owned. Sh'l'ha. The sharing of minds and lowering of personal barriers to such a deep level that each entity became a part of the other, sharing each other's awareness. The completing of self by acceptance of another.

Going over the dream/vision again in his mind, he felt a strange expectancy building within him, as if something that he had subconsciously waited for all his life was within reach.

He had known love during the years, but only as fleeting rays of sunshine in a lonely existence. There was Bones, of course, an old and trusted friend, but even his warmth did not dispel the deeper shadows.

And there was Spock. In the past he had never delved too deeply into his feeling for his First Officer. Now it seemed important that he open the door to those feelings, examine them.

Warmth, affection, love - as for a brother. These were simply surface emotions, beneath lay a deeper love... a drawing of the soul. Spock called to him, as no-one else ever had, and buried deep within him was a yearning to surrender... completely.

The thought frightened him for a moment, and briefly he wondered if... But just as quickly he dismissed the thought. There was nothing physical in what he felt for Spock. The love was of the heart and mind, not of the body. He knew now with certainty that he wanted more than friendship, and so - he thought - did Spock.

Sh'l'ha... it sounded beautiful.

Now with quiet confidence he walked beside his friend into the coolness of their sleeping quarters, and waited.

Spock gradually relaxed into the silence as the minutes ticked slowly away. He knew Jim would wait patiently for him to speak, and he had to be sure.

Sh'l'ha required the lowering of all barriers... a baring of the soul... the giving of one's complete self.

It would not be easy - even for a full Vulcan it was not easy, and rarely achieved. For him it would be twice as hard. Taught from childhood to suppress his Human emotions as undesirable elements in his character, he would now have to reveal them in all their naked rawness, accept them as part of himself. Offer them willingly, and in return he would have to accept the emotions of this man he called friend, and not be drowned by them.

It would be painful. Even now a part of him flinched away from the thought, but he must NOT shy away. He must face them - accept.

His Human half ached for the closeness his Vulcan half shrank from. A curtain formed in his mind, warm viridian drops of life. Could he succeed? Could he conquer the distaste of his old-self?

He had not succeeded in conquering his Human half. Dare he risk this life that meant so much to him?

Human instinct whispered that it would be an experience more beautiful than he could possibly imagine, and at the very core of his existence he wanted it.

Time marched onwards into oblivion. The very air about them seemed suspended, as if the room itself was holding its breath.

Kirk could hear the faster beating of Spock's heart, smell the spicy alien fragrance, feel the dry warmth emanating from his friend, and a wave of tenderness surged up, washing over him, rushing along his veins as lifeblood, flowing from him... touching the lean frame with amber softness. And the call was answered.

"I wish to be one with you."

The gently whispered words shattered the stillness into cascading lights. The air shimmered around them. A smile curved the lips, but the hazel eyes remained serious.

"It sounds beautiful."

An answering smile reflected in the dark eyes. "For me, perfection."

Kirk felt himself colour, suddenly shy, vulnerable, reality having slipped away into this dream world. His cool, logical friend seemed very alien in that moment, and a shiver of anticipation ran through him.

Slowly he reached out his hand and touched the Vulcan's cheek. "Meld with me..."

Gentle fingers rested against his skin, their warmth seeping into him. A featherlight touch skimmed his senses, and peace and reassurance flowed like cool light.

He felt the familiar presence sinking with infinite care deeper and deeper into his consciousness, merging to an iridescent sparkle melting through barriers, spiralling downwards.

He was as two, touching and touched, wandering down the cold white corridors of a logical mind, and the sterility was an ache within him, the loneliness a physical pain.

Shuddering, he sank against the witness. Amber glow reflecting, washing away the coldness, slipping beneath the shield.

Flowing through memories opening up before him, experiencing all that was past, sharing the pain, easing.

Spreading his light through the dark ways, scattering the shadows with the brightness.



Feeling the hidden spring surge up, crash through the bleak barriers, catching his breath with the sudden pain which was not his... yet was.

Seared by the fire of emotions coursing through him, loving with an intensity that hurt.

Opening up his soul, seeing with wondering eyes other secrets not of his keeping.

Completely known and knowing... Sh'l'ha...

Gold and silver notes of a melody beyond beauty, filled with sweetness, echoing haunting along the nerves, weaving in filaments. Sparkkling, shimmering light, myriad colours melting, flowing together... one.

Floating on a sea of joy, calm, relaxed, peacefully watching the world form around. Content in reality to feel the warm glow deep inside... to be the warm glow nestled at the heart.

"We are one... T'hy'la."

Hazel eyes smiled. "One."

Silence settled, warm, comfortable, needing no words in the closeness. The completeness of the two enhanced the stillness of the room.

Spock awoke to a sense of peace and warmth that pervaded his whole body. With a faint sigh of contentment he snuggled into the bed, relaxing completely in the sense of well-being. Tentatively he sent a tendril of thought towards his friend, and smiled as his mind met the sleepy haze of contented happiness.

//Good morning, Jim.//

//What? Spock?..We're linked...// He automatically spoke the words aloud as well as thinking them.

A shy ripple of mind-laughter. //Of course. We are one... T'hy'la.//

An answering smile flooded Spock's mind. //Will we always be able to talk to each other like this?//

//Of course. However, I shall teach you to erect barriers.//

Kirk slid out of bed and donning a robe walked through into Spock's room. "There is no need for barriers, my friend."

The Vulcan's stern features relaxed into a slight smile, and a warm glow kindled in his velvet-dark eyes. "I will teach you, however. There will be times when you will require privacy, and I have no wish to intrude. When you have learned to erect your barriers I will only share your mind when you so wish it. I will also teach you how to reach my mind unaided."

Kirk perched on the side of the bed, a soft smile on his lips. Bending forward slightly, he gently touched the Vulcan's face with his fingertips.

"T'hy'la... It feels so right, so... complete... There's a warm stillness inside... a kind of peace I've never experienced before."

"I know, Jim. I too feel it. You have seen all that I am, and accepted me - as I am. For the first time in my life I am at peace with myself."

"Perhaps we can go home now?" Kirk cocked an enquiring eyebrow, and was amazed to see a faint green flush suffuse his friend's face.

"Indeed. If my interpretation of the vision is correct then we can, in fact, now go home."

"Good. Bones will probably be tearing his hair out with worry by now." A devilish light suddenly danced in the hazel eyes as he grabbed the bedcover and whipped it off Spock. "Come on, lazybones - out you get!"

"Yes, Captain. At once, Captain!" The solemnness of the reply was belied by the answering twinkle in Spock's eyes.

Laughing delightedly Kirk returned to his own room to dress. It felt so good to be alive. Joy bubbled up inside him and spilled over into a wide grin.

Sh'l'ha - the key to the doorway home. Of that fact he now had no doubt. But first they must see Tolaare.

Six hours later the four figures slowly made their way up the stone steps of the hillside to the cave entrance. Once inside they waited patiently while Tolaare regained his breath before walking to the edge of the chasm.

For a moment he stood gazing out into the blackness beyond, then slowly turned and spoke.

"Captain Kirk... Commander Spock... There is grave danger. Oneness must be complete or lives will be lost, and there will be no second time."

"We understand, Tolaare," replied Kirk. "We are prepared."

Tolaare turned his gaze to Spock. "Commander Spock, you are two within one. Are you sure?"

For a moment a curtain of crimson droplets swam before Spock's eyes. Deliberately he shut it out of his thoughts.

"I am," was all he said, but it seemed enough for Tolaare.

"Kt'suma, daughter of the mirror pool, from the yr'ling of your life the vision has been. Now is the time... give of yourself freely."

"I give of my life's blood freely... the words of Kor shall be spoken..."

dark star and amber glow shall merge... rise... green fire... time shall be opened." With these words she crossed the cavern sloor and stepped up to the ebony pillar.

Tolaare motioned for Kirk and Spock to take their places on the platform beneath the stone.

"When the words of Kor are spoken step out into the flames as one, and you will return to your own time." He hesitated, then continued, "Fail, and death awaits you."

"We will not fail," came Spock's firm reply.

"Then peace go with you, and my blessing." He nodded slightly to Kt'suma, who raised her hands towards the milky white stone in silence.

Spock gently placed his hands on Kirk's face and slowly reached for the deepest levels of the meld. In response he felt Jim's hand lightly touch his face, and opened his mind in welcome. Warmth flowed into him, coursing through his being like liquid gold, and he opened his heart to it, welcomed it into his soul... drowned in the amber glow... shyly offering all that he was to this warm light which was more than life... his existence... which was his eternity. Deep within him a tiny flame kindled, flickered, grew stronger, spiralling through his veins, leaping through his thoughts, burning his mind with its desire to know. He felt the indrawn breath as it were his own, and he plunged deeper, deeper... seeing all in the completeness of the giving, and the flame glowed brighter with the knowledge of the love that was pouring out to him, and his own love became a fire within him.

Green fire... and amber glow... merging... entwining... around, through, within... and they were one...

... as if from a great distance they became aware of words being spoken...

"Pendar...

...Two as One...

Light the stone of Kordan..."

... the words echoed through the stillness, and the opalescent stone above them seemed to dissolve, melting to golden hue laced with jasper light... fluid... glowing...

Again the words filled the air about them... calling...

"... From the depths... flickering flame...
Spread the curtain of time
From 'Where Is' to...
'Where Would Be'..."

... then fading. Through the inky blackness of the chasm below a light glowed, an amber sheen shot with jade... twisting itself into flames dancing through the void... a shimmering curtain... swirling and twisting into bronze and emerald tongues of light...

In the cavern they stood still, silent, hands lightly touching each other's faces, locked within each other. Again the words rose around them...

"...With life's blood..."

Kt'suma slowly ran her wrists down the sharp edges of the pillar, spreading her arms wide.

"...The ancient words of Kor..."

Matching each word with a single drop of blood she intoned the lost words.

"...S'Kor... Pre'demate... Ol'latooome...
Cre'valt... H'Grath... Jeldrae... I'mm...
M'hieia..."

In their one being they heard the ancient words... Crimson shards sparkled

within the bronze and emerald light... The whole flared brightly and the curtain was gone, leaving only an amber and jade mist. Without fear, strong in their unity, bound by love, they stepped out into time and were gone.

Withing the stone the amber glow shot through with green fire flamed and faded to irridescent whiteness once more. Kt'suma sank to the ground and gazed at her wrists in wonder - the cuts had disappeared.

"They are home, my daughter." Tolaare stated softly as he helped her to her feet. "And the words?"

"My memory holds the words." She smiled at the old man. "The gate is open."

"Then we must see that it stays so, my child. The words will be engraved on the cavern floor."

* * *

Kirk and Spock regained consciousness together to the sound of McCoy's voice calling their names.

"Jim! Spock! Jim! Damn you....!" He shook Kirk's shoulder. "Jim!"

"Bones?"

"Thank God! I thought I'd lost you..."

"As you can see, Doctor, you have not," a cool voice interrupted him.

"No thanks to you!" McCoy's anger flared. They'd frightened him half out of his wits disappearing like that then suddenly reappearing in an unconscious heap. "Where the hell did you go to?"

"Calm down, Bones. It's a long story, and you're not going to believe half of it anyway." Kirk glanced around him. "Nice to see you were worried enough to organise a search party," he said accusingly, indicating the empty cavern.

"Wha' you mean? Search party, indeed! You were back before you went, nearly. Thank God!" he added as an afterthought.

"But we've been gone weeks!" a puzzled Kirk replied.

"Evidently not, Jim," Spock broke in. "It seems we have returned to the same time as we left. Fascinating."

"Hmfff... Probably would be to you," muttered McCoy. "Sure scared the hell out of me, though." He stood up and dusted his knees. "Come on, you two. I want you in Sickbay for a complete checkup as soon as possible."

Kirk and Spock exchanged glances. "He's mothering us again."

"So I have noticed, Captain, although 'bullying' would be a better word."

"Careful, Spock, or I'll tell..." Kirk's eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Tell what?" asked McCoy curiously. Somehow there seemed to be something different about his two friends. Something had happened, wherever they'd been, something which had affected them deeply. Now that he took a good look, unclouded by anxiety for their safety, he noticed the air of peace which radiated from them... peace, and a deep sense of happiness. Yes, there was definitely a happy air about Spock... now that was fascinating - to say the least.

"Oh, nothing, Bones. I just found out one of Spock's weaknesses, that's all."

McCoy stared at him in mock surprise. "You mean he's actually got one?"

"Oh yes, he's got one," a laughing Kirk replied. "And wouldn't you just love to know what!"

McCoy looked from one to the other. "You're having me on," he stated accusingly.

"Am I?" asked innocent-faced Kirk.

McCoy turned to Spock, but the Vulcan remained silent and regarded him coolly, with a slight lift of the eyebrow... yet, for a second there McCoy could have sworn there was laughter in those deep dark eyes. Oh well, he thought, at least I know he's got one. Only hope it doesn't pop up at all the wrong moments.

Kirk rose to his feet and held out his hand to help Spock up. "Come on, let's get you home." With his mind he added, //I might even come and tuck you in tonight.//

//Perhaps you could also provide a teddy bear?// came the teasing reply. Laughter rippled along the link, reflecting in dark and hazel eyes.

ONE OF THOSE @+ "%&! DAYS by Gladys Oliver

I step down from the shuttle,
Feet don't coordinate.
Headlong I fall into waiting arms.
Satyr-brows wing to parts unknown,
Spock otherwise remains unmoved.

... I apologise.

Stepping from the hangar deck, door has other ideas,
Snaps shut on waiting ankle bone.
I hop about, and - but for twenty crewmen -
... am all alone!
Captain's wry grin isn't helping...

Into my headquarters at a hurried limp.
Chapel shows staggered surprise
As I back my rump onto her hypo,
Bringing tears to my eyes.
... Curses should help, but don't!

Decided I've had enough.
An early night seems on the cards.
Stepping from the shower, towel catches on the door,
Naked I go skidding
Across the dripping wet floor.
... Spock chooses this moment to call!

Vulcan legs like ninepins go
As into a heap we fall,
And I'm finally realising -
It's not my @+ "%&! day at all!!!!

SOMETIMES by Marion McChesney

Sometimes I steal a look across the Bridge
When I'm sure he doesn't see
And wonder what I would be without him.
He lights my life with a warmth I'd never known.
His smile brightens the days.
His friendship keeps away the nightmares.
He brings the peace I've always longed for.
Just his being brings a quiet joy to my life.
I know it is illogical... and yet
I love.

THE STAR OF CEPHEUS by Vicki Richards

Spock stood up and switched off the display on the computer terminal he had been studying. Relaxation means different things to different people, but even though his complex research had indeed been interesting, even Vulcans need some sleep. Spock left the laboratory and made his way towards his cabin.

As his door opened in front of him, James Kirk appeared from next door, as if he had somehow sensed the First Officer's approach and had been waiting for him.

"Ah - Mr. Spock. Could you step in here a moment? There is a matter I need to discuss with you."

Spock nodded and followed Kirk back into his cabin, his curiosity thoroughly aroused. It was not often that the Captain used his formal title these days, and Spock had noticed that he had seemed a little preoccupied on one or two occasions lately. Yet Jim had seemed more excited than worried. What could possibly be causing the Captain to react in this way?

"I've been meaning to talk this over with you for a few days, Spock, but I decided to wait until the arrangements were made definite, which they now have been." Kirk sat down and waved Spock into another seat, picking up a letter on his desk.

"Arrangements, Captain?" If Jim didn't tell him what it was about soon, Spock was going to have a hard job keeping his curiosity from overcoming his considerable patience.

"Yes - I've just received confirmation." Kirk was almost bursting to tell his Vulcan friend what it was about, yet somehow he was perversely enjoying watching Spock trying to restrain himself from asking. But he couldn't stand it any longer. He was so pleased at what he had been able to arrange that he had to tell someone.

"It's about Bones, Spock." Kirk was beaming all over his face, and couldn't keep the pride out of his voice. "After all these years the Federation have finally recognised all the good work he's done for medicine. Oh, I know he's been honoured before, but not quite like this. He's to be awarded the Star of Cepheus for his services to medical research."

Spock was suitably impressed. "That is indeed a high honour, Captain, and I have no doubt that the doctor deserves it. In which field of research has he won this award?"

"I'm sure he'd be glad to hear you say that, Spock. Don't worry - I won't tell him! Actually, although the Star of Cepheus is usually awarded for outstanding services in one field, in Bones' case they're honouring him for his work in several; for the many cures he's found for varying diseases while on the Enterprise, for his research into Fabrini medicine - and that looks like benefiting half the galaxy, though he'd never admit it if you asked him. Oh, and also for his work on the medical problems of hybrids, apart from many other things."

"Indeed, Captain?" Spock resolutely refused to allow his eyebrow to rise, not entirely certain whether or not the Captain was indulging in the illogical Terran custom of leg-pulling over that last item on the not unimpressive list. But either way, Leonard McCoy certainly deserved the honour.

"But I haven't told you the best part yet," Kirk went on, enjoying himself considerably. He had worked very hard to get Starfleet to agree to all he wanted on this. "You know that the Star of Cepheus is awarded each year at a small, select gathering of the finest medical brains in the galaxy - well, this time that gathering is going to be here, on the Enterprise. Can you imagine Bones' reaction when he finds out?"

"I should imagine the doctor will be very pleased." For a Vulcan, Spock was practically speechless. How had Jim managed that? No doubt he had pointed

out the advantages to Starfleet's public relations of having such a prestigious intergalactic gathering on one of its Starships. It was no mean feat, managing Starfleet hierarchy - McCoy should indeed be pleased.

"Pleased, Spock? He'll probably be so shocked he won't be able to crack a joke for a week!"

"I sincerely hope so." Spock had recovered his tongue.

"But I need your help." Kirk couldn't help but smile at his First Officer's predictable reaction.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Spock. It's going to be very difficult concealing this award business until the actual moment when it's due to be presented. Naturally, we're going to have to tell him about the conference, but it's when all the guests arrive that the problems are going to start. It was the idea of one of them, Dr. Kelna, an old friend of Bones, that we keep the award secret as a surprise in the first place, and I think the others have all agreed about that; but it's still going to be awkward to arrange.

"I shall naturally help in any way I can, Captain," Spock replied formally, "although I suspect that the difficulties you foresee may turn out to be greater than you think."

Spock never did explain his cryptic comment completely, but as the day of the gathering drew nearer, and all the necessary arrangements were made without serious complications, Kirk forgot about it. He was both thankful, as always, for the Vulcan's help, and pleased that Spock was clearly as proud as he was about McCoy getting the award, though naturally he concealed the fact from everybody else. In the end he decided Spock's words had been only a comment on the Vulcan's opinion of the ability of some Humans to keep secrets. But since only he and Spock aboard the Enterprise knew about the Star of Cepheus, he didn't see that there was anything to worry about.

McCoy was as pleased as they had known he would be about the gathering, and entered wholeheartedly into making the arrangements. He had once asked why the gathering was to be held aboard the Enterprise, but Kirk had passed it off with a story about Starfleet thinking it would be a good public relations exercise (Spock had been right about that) and put up quite a convincing performance of being mildly irritated by the whole thing. Speculations on McCoy's part as to who was to receive the Star of Cepheus at this annual meeting were left unanswered.

Finally the day came, and the interstellar shuttle carrying the cream of the Federation's medical men and women docked with the Enterprise. Kirk, Spock and McCoy were there to greet them as they finally set foot on the Starship.

"Leonard, how good to see you again!" Dr. Kelna rushed out of the airlock and grabbed McCoy by the hand, pumping it enthusiastically, his antennae waving about as he did so.

"It's good to see you again, Kel. How many years has it been?" McCoy's obvious delight at seeing his Andorian colleague again earned him a strange look from Spock, but the good doctor was far too involved in the honour of hosting this prestigious gathering even to notice.

One by one the eight delegates were greeted by the Enterprise officers, according to their varying customs, and were then escorted to their rooms after a short welcoming speech by Captain James T. Kirk, where they were left to refresh themselves before the dinner being held to mark the official opening of the gathering.

As the Star of Cepheus was to be awarded first thing in the morning, when

the conference really got underway, they didn't have to keep the secret for much longer, and with the cooperation of the guests it began to look as if they might just pull it off.

That was, until Spock saw Dr. Sturm heading for Sickbay.

The dinner had gone off very well, and the guests, after a brief tour of the ship and a longer one of Sickbay, had retired to their cabins, where they had promptly begun to hold a party.

McCoy had unfortunately been called back to Sickbay to attend to a crewman grumbling of severe stomach pains. (McCoy privately thought the attack had been brought on by the crewman's consuming various alien dishes definitely not intended for digestion by Humans, although the crewman vigorously denied this.) It was after this that Spock encountered Dr. Sturm walking determinedly along the corridor in the direction of Sickbay.

Kelna had warned Jim, who had then naturally warned Spock, that the awe-inspiring Vulcan Dr. Sturm thought it completely illogical to attempt to keep the award of the Star of Cepheus secret from McCoy, so when Spock came across Sturm heading for Sickbay with a determined expression on his face (and Spock knew a determined Vulcan when he saw one) he put two and two together, and didn't much care for the answer.

If he didn't do something immediately the game would be up.

"Ah...er... Dr. Sturm," said Spock politely, inclining his head to the other Vulcan as he stepped out in front of him. Not that he had the slightest idea of what he was going to say.

"Mr. Spock," Sturm acknowledged gravely. "Was there something about which you needed to see me?"

"Indeed... I... there was a matter I wished to discuss with you."

"Yes?"

"Yes. A matter of research. I wished to have your opinion." Spock was aware that he was waffling, and also had the terrible feeling that at any minute Sturm was going to decide that Spock wasn't exactly behaving in a manner becoming a Vulcan. To put it mildly.

"My opinion on which subject?" Sturm was regarding the First Officer very quizzically.

For practically the first time in his life Spock didn't carefully consider his words before uttering them; he simply said the first thing that came into his head.

"On a subject I have been researching. Although I do not normally specialise in medical matters, I have had occasion to work with Dr. McCoy in the past, and I have developed a special interest in the logical procedures for isolating new antidotes, especially when there is only a limited amount of time available - as is so often the case."

"Ah! That is also an interest of mine, Mr. Spock."

If Spock hadn't known he was addressing another Vulcan, he would have suspected Sturm of showing excitement. As it was, Spock had clearly managed to pick on a subject Sturm would no doubt know all about; he was bound to be found out. What was worse, Sturm knew T'Pol. If he made a complete fool of himself and it got back to his family....!

"Well, Mr. Spock, I had intended to go to Sickbay; there is also a matter I wish to discuss with Dr. McCoy urgently. However, since your interests and mine seem to be at least partly the same, I should be most interested to see what progress you have made in your research. Where is your data? In the laboratory?"

All Sturm's attention was focussed on poor Spock now. He had succeeded in

diverting attention from McCoy, but what of himself? If he took Sturm back to the lab, and Sturm discovered he hadn't any data, he would think he was either lying or unstable, and it amounted to pretty much the same thing in a Vulcan; and if he tried to make an excuse to get himself out of it, Sturm would probably only come to the same conclusion anyway. He was beginning to wonder of the unthinkable was possible after all - that a Vulcan could experience fear. He was certainly feeling very uncomfortable.

"Well, actually, Dr. Sturm - yes, in the laboratory." Spock couldn't think of anything else to say. At least he would have the time it took them to get to the lab to try and think of something, though he didn't know what. If he could only get a few minutes alone with the computer he could rig up some convincing-looking data; he had never claimed to be an expert in the field, after all. But he couldn't see how that was possible, either. Spock was beginning to have visions of being called in front of his revered grandmother to answer for his illogical and un-Vulcan behaviour.

But just as he and Sturm turned to walk towards the lab, a voice called them from behind.

"There you are, Sturm. Spock, where are you taking him off to?" It was none other than McCoy himself, come from Sickbay to look for the Vulcan doctor, whom he had obviously been expecting.

"Doctor McCoy," Sturm greeted the Ship's Surgeon formally. The other Vulcan present didn't say anything at all.

"I thought you were coming to Sickbay so I could show you my research into combatting Berthold radiation?" McCoy sounded a little disgruntled.

"Indeed I was, Doctor," Sturm replied, "but Mr. Spock here wanted to show me some data he has on another matter of research which I am also interested in, and since he seemed most insistent that I accompany him, I was about to do so. I had intended to come to Sickbay and keep our appointment as soon as possible."

"What research was that, Spock?" McCoy peered at the First Officer, puzzled and a little indignant. He had finally met a Vulcan whose interests tallied with his own, and now here was Spock of all people dragging him off to look at something else. Dammit, his ideas on Berthold radiation just might be important, and he badly wanted to discuss it with Sturm, who was something of an expert in the field. Just what had Spock been up to?

"Nothing of importance, Doctor." Spock was desperately trying to think of something to say to get him out of this dreadful situation. "I had not realised that you and Dr. Sturm had an appointment. I must excuse myself. I think I may be needed on the Bridge."

"I must disagree with you, Mr. Spock." Sturm turned and positively glared at the Vulcan. "The logical procedures for isolating antidotes in an area of very great importance. And if you are needed on the Bridge, why did you ask me to accompany you to the laboratory?"

"Spock?" McCoy was downright suspicious.

"I have just remembered, I..."

"Are you all right, Spock? You look a little pale." McCoy's suspicion was turning to concern.

"I am fine, Doctor, but there is a matter I must discuss with the Captain urgently - it has only just occurred to me. I really must excuse myself. Goodnight, gentlemen."

Spock turned, walked quickly down the corridor with both the doctors staring after him, and made his escape via the nearest turbolift.

He sent it to Deck 5, and had to suppress the urge to sigh with relief.

What would Sturm think of him? And McCoy? He half expected to be summoned to Sickbay for a complete physical as soon as the gathering was over.

The turbolift arrived, and Spock stepped into the corridor, hoping he didn't bump into Jim Kirk. Somehow he didn't think he could face Jim tonight. Not after what had just happened. If he did meet him, and he asked how Spock's evening had gone, Spock wasn't exactly sure how he could tell him.

But thankfully he reached his cabin without meeting anyone at all. He had never been so grateful for the haven of his own small room.

The following morning Spock timed his entry to the opening ceremony very carefully. He waited until almost the last moment before entering the Rec Deck, on which the opening ceremony was to be held, and found that it was as he had hoped; both McCoy and Sturm were already on the specially erected rostrum with the other seven distinguished doctors, and wouldn't be able to leave it until the ceremony was over. He was safe for the moment.

The Rec Deck was quite full; a great many of the Enterprise's crew had come along to listen, including most of the Medical and Science Departments. Not far from the front stood Jim Kirk. Spock made his way through the gathered throng towards him.

The Rec Deck was certainly crowded; the award of the Star of Cepheus was of interest to practically everybody, and as soon as the winner was announced the news would be sent across the galaxy. Spock hoped that McCoy would be delighted enough with the surprise of the honour to justify all he had been going through.

As he neared Kirk, the Captain turned to face him, as if he had known he was coming. Spock had known he would. With a sinking feeling he also realised what Kirk's next words would be about.

"There you are, Spock - I thought you were going to miss it. Are you feeling all right? Bones said he thought there was something wrong; something about your being under too much stress." Kirk's face was completely serious.

Spock just didn't know where to begin. "Well, Captain, it has to do with..."

"Yes," Kirk interrupted before the unfortunate Vulcan could get even half an explanation out, "Apparently it was Dr. Sturm who first told Bones he thought there was something wrong. The word 'unstable' was mentioned, I believe."

"Captain?" Spock was horrified. But it was no more than he had expected. Visions of T'Pol and Sarek disowning him came rushing into his mind. Then he noticed that Kirk was grinning.

"Captain!"

"I'm sorry, Spock - I couldn't resist it." Kirk laughed and clapped the shocked Vulcan on the back. "When Bones came to me with the story of what you did last night, I put two and two together straight away. I had a hard job trying to explain your behaviour, though, and I'm afraid Bones and Sturm really do think that something is wrong; but don't worry - it isn't as bad as I told you. It's a shame that all your efforts were wasted, though; Sturm wasn't going to tell McCoy about the Star of Cepheus after all. He agreed to abide by the wishes of the others. Kelna told me afterwards; when I explained what was going on he offered to explain it all to Sturm. But I told him not to; I didn't think you'd want him to."

"Thank you, Captain," Spock almost growled.

Jim was right; if Sturm found out what he, a Vulcan, had really been doing, he would think it worse than what he thought he had been doing. Though if Jim had only been joking about what Sturm thought, it wasn't as bad as he had feared. He had only to keep out of the other Vulcan's way until he left the Enterprise, and he might just get away with it. He was beginning to wonder if it had all been worth it.

He was about to find out. Their attention was called to the front; the opening ceremony was about to begin. Dr. Barrat, one of the two Humans apart from McCoy in the party stood up and made an announcement.

"Welcome, gentlebeings, to this our annual gathering of medical minds." Dr. Barrat was beaming; this was an award she was very proud to present.

"We are very glad to be here on the Enterprise, for as you know this ship on her missions has been the place where many new cures and techniques have been discovered. As you also know, the very first and one of the most important things we do at our gathering each year is to name the person who is to receive the coveted Star of Cepheus. I mentioned the work carried out on the Enterprise for a reason. That is because the winner of this year's award, for great services to medicine, is none other than the Enterprise's Chief Surgeon, Doctor Leonard McCoy."

The Rec Deck burst into tumultuous, wild applause and loud cheering. The Enterprise crew couldn't believe it; they were so proud the award was going to McCoy.

McCoy himself looked like he couldn't believe it either. He sat on the rostrum open-mouthed and completely flabbergasted. He seemed to have lost the use of his tongue until Dr. Barrat placed the silver Star of Cepheus medallion around his neck. Then he managed a mumbled 'Thank you.'

Spock was of the opinion that it was a good thing the winner was not required to make a speech; at that moment it didn't look like McCoy was capable of it. As for Jim Kirk, he cheered and clapped louder than anybody.

The rest of the opening ceremony wasn't long, and really consisted of nothing more than the other doctors congratulating McCoy, and Dr. Barrat declaring the gathering open. It was over too soon for Spock, however, for no sooner had McCoy got down from the rostrum than he had spotted Jim and Spock, and had begun to head towards them with a gleam in his eyes that told the Vulcan he was beginning to suspect what the night before's uncharacteristic behaviour had really been about.

However, McCoy was far too amazed and pleased about the award he had received to be too much his usual caustic self.

"Jim! Spock! I can't believe this, I really can't! You planned it all, didn't you? I wondered why the gathering was being held on the Enterprise! And Spock, you old fraud - last night was something to do with it, wasn't it? You were trying to stop me from finding out."

"Yes, he was, Bones," Kirk answered for the totally flummoxed Vulcan. "We both wanted it to be a surprise."

"And it is. Thank you both. Oh - here's Sturm coming. I think he want to talk to you about something, Spock." McCoy's voice was innocent; but his expression wasn't.

"Oh. I... Excuse me, gentlemen." Spock hurriedly made his escape. He had seen Sturm bearing down on him with the same determined expression he had seen on his face the night before, and he was not staying around. As he wove his way through the crowd towards the door, it seemed to the watching Kirk and McCoy that he was almost running.

Spock left the room with a furtive glance over his shoulder, just in time to see McCoy skillfully steering Sturm back into the room, and Kirk slowly beginning to have hysterics.

If such a thing was possible, the next few days just might see the creation of the galaxy's first Vulcan nervous wreck. Spock vowed there and then never to have anything more to do with doctors unless he absolutely had to. The trouble was, the trouble had been started by and because of a doctor; and Spock doubted that McCoy was ever going to let him forget the day he was awarded the Star of Cepheus.

HALF VULCAN

You called me, Jim.
 Across the galaxy I came.
 Just on the fringe
 Of Kolinahr I heard your name -
 But all I felt, as I obeyed, was shame.

Yet now I know this was the better part.
 Nirvana pales beside the Human heart
 Which is my heritage.
 And you, my father;
 Through whose love choice I had it,
 Would you rather
 I turned my back on values you endorse?
 Answer one question. Do you feel remorse
 That you it was
 Gave me a Human mother?

You smile, they say, very much more than I.
 That may well be; you never wished to die
 As I have done, born between two extremes
 Divided by our so-opposing dreams.

I lived in limbo, but now I have found love
 Among my mother's people. Stars above
 My home, and no fixed planet, yet I do not forget
 You are my father, and I love you yet.

Monica Burnett.

AN ADMIRAL'S LAMENT

It's grand to be an Admiral,
 An extra gold braid on my arm.
 Through Fleet HQ I boldly go
 To keep the Universe from harm;
 But! - (bow your head, avert your eyes)
 Especially the Enterprise.

A living legend by day, that's me.
 See how the syncophantic hordes
 Whisper as I pass them by,
 'That's Admiral Kirk, the Lord of Lords!'
 But! - (every night I pray to thee
 Oh Great Bird of the Galaxy!)

I must out to the stars again
 To the lonely stars in the sky
 And all I ask is my own ship...
 And a friend to say goodbye.

It's grand to be an Admiral,
 An extra gold braid on my arm.
 Through Fleet HQ I boldly go
 To keep the Universe from harm;
 But! - (hark the herald angels mock).
 Especially Commander Spock.

Therese Holmes

THE PARADISE SYNDROME - AFTERMATH by Ann Preece

"...It's so sad to be alone,
Help me make it through the night..."

Kris Kristofferson

Kirk didn't know how long he had sat by Miramanee's side, holding the now cold fingers tightly between his own trembling hands - minutes, or hours, he neither knew nor cared. He was conscious of only one thought: Miramanee - his 'wife' - was dead; so, too, was their unborn child - his child. Now, once again, he was James T. Kirk, the lonely Starship Captain. The life he had lived over the past months might never have existed: 'Kiròk' was no more... and Miramanee? Gone from his life, but never from his memory...

He felt the bitter sting of tears on his cheeks as his grief rushed to the surface, threatening to consume him. His vision blurred, the image of Miramanee wavered - and then he felt a gentle hand on his shoulder, heard a soft voice murmur his name, and wearily he dragged himself abck to reality.

Raising his eyes, misty with tears, Kirk's haunted gaze focussed on the newcomer, knowing without question who it would be.

Silently Spock searched his friend's face, noting with concern the strained expression; the hazel eyes, usually so clear, now dull with misery and a deep-rooted pain; and realised that Kirk would need time - a great deal of time - to come to terms with this loss. But Spock was confident that Kirk would come through this - for he would be there to help him, to offer comfort and support as he had always done in the past.

"Jim - it is time to leave. Come..."

"But... Miramanee..." Kirk began, then paused, his voice faltering.

"You cannot help her now, Jim, and remaining here will only serve to make matters worse. You have your own life to lead - in your own world - among people who care about you... as you care for them. Miramanee belongs here... with her own people. They will take care of her... there is nothing more you can do." He held out his hand. "Let me take you home..."

Kirk hesitated for a moment, permitting himself one last, lingering look at Miramanee's peaceful face, before he accepted Spock's proffered hand. Immediately the long fingers closed around his - protecting, offering support.

And when Kirk asked, somewhat hesitantly, "Spock... will you help me?" the Vulcan knew that he was not referring to physical help.

Spock said nothing, but the dark eyes fixed on Kirk's face, conveying an unspoken message - a message of compassion, understanding, caring... and honest love. It was an expression which Spock would reveal to only one person, and despite his grief Kirk felt a sudden surge of warmth suffusing his entire being. Spock would help him - his unspoken promise had said as much.

The spell broken, Kirk rose to his feet as Spock drew out his communicator and contacted the ship.

"Spock to Enterprise."

At once Uhura's voice answered, filtering over the distance which separated them.

"Enterprise. Uhura here."

"Lieutenant - please notify the Transporter Room - two to beam up."

"Aye, sir."

For the last time Kirk allowed his gaze to wander around the familiar surroundings which had been his home for the past months, before closing his eyes in a vain attempt to blot out the memories, forget the pain. When he opened them again he was safe aboard the Enterprise.

As soon as Kirk and Spock materialised on the transporter pads McCoy moved forward, medical scanner at the ready, his blue eyes worriedly surveying the Captain's face for signs of tiredness and strain. Gently, he helped Kirk on to a waiting trolley.

"Take it easy, Jim... Let's get you down to Sickbay."

Kirk began to protest. "There's no deed for that, Bones - really there isn't. I'm fine... perhaps a little tired, but otherwise..."

McCoy interrupted. "I thought I was the doctor on this ship, or have our roles been reversed all of a sudden?"

As Kirk looked uncomfortable, McCoy's tone softened as he continued, "No. I thought not. I want to give you a thorough examination before I pronounce you fit for duty. There's nothing to worry about - Scotty is running the ship - so no more argument... please."

Kirk fell back, resigning himself to the inevitable. Too tired to argue, he surrendered himself to McCoy's ministrations, and the small party made its way to Sickbay.

* * *

Spock stood in the shadows, watching intently as McCoy completed his examination. On the diagnostic bed Kirk lay motionless, seemingly oblivious of his surroundings, a distant, far-away look in the hazel eyes.

"Well, Jim, I'm pleased to say that there's nothing wrong with you that a good rest won't cure," McCoy said, forcing a lightness into his voice which he was very far from feeling. "Sleep is the best medicine for you right now, so I'm going to prescribe rest... plenty of rest..."

Kirk forced himself to meet McCoy's concerned gaze. "I - don't have to stay here... do I, Bones?"

"No-o, I don't think so," McCoy admitted. "As long as you promise me that you'll go straight to your quarters and rest - and I mean rest - then there's no need for you to stay here..."

Almost before McCoy had finished speaking, Kirk had swung his feet to the floor and stumbled blindly to the door. Spock and McCoy watched him go, worry showing clearly on both their faces.

"Doctor - what is Jim's true condition?" Spock asked.

McCoy hesitated for a moment before replying. "Well... as I said, physically he couldn't be fitter. The months he spent on that world certainly helped to ease the pressures of command - we both know the strain Jim lives under from day to day - and thanks to your help, he's completely recovered from his attack on amnesia.

"But - mentally, emotionally... well, it's difficult to say. You saw for yourself - the James Kirk who walked out of here a few moments ago wasn't the James Kirk we both know. I've seen Jim in many moods - happy, sad, angry, teasing - yet I've never seen him quite like this before. This hurt goes deep, and it's going to need a lot of help - and a lot of understanding." He paused before adding wistfully, "I hope he'll be all right. He looked so... lost, so... lonely... when he left. It doesn't seem right that he should be alone... not tonight..."

Spock's reply was quiet. "He won't be, Doctor. When he needs me - I shall be there."

"You'll help him." It was not a question.

"I promised Jim my help before we left Miramanee's world."

"But Spock, are you sure you feel up to it? After all, these last months haven't exactly been easy - particularly for you. You drove yourself so hard,

trying to decipher the symbols on that obelisk - you've hardly eaten, hardly slept despite my orders to the contrary. I don't want you collapsing from exhaustion and nervous strain."

"Rest is of secondary importance at this precise moment, Doctor. The Captain's welfare comes first."

"As usual." McCoy voiced the unspoken thought aloud. "Jim will always come first with you, won't he, Spock?"

Spock remained silent, but a slight nod from McCoy told him all he needed to know: the doctor understood. As the First Officer moved towards the door, McCoy whispered softly, almost to himself,

"If anyone can help Jim Kirk, it's you, Spock. He's needed your help before - Lord knows, he's going to need that help now. He relies so much on your strength and support, and somehow I know you won't fail him..."

* * *

Spock made his way to Kirk's quarters, pausing for a brief moment outside the door before pressing the buzzer for admittance. There was no sound from within, but as Spock raised his hand once more the door slid open.

The outer office was dark and empty, but a soft glow of light suffused the sleeping quarters, and it was to this area that Spock quietly made his way.

Kirk was sitting on the edge of the bed, a still figure, his face buried in his hands. He didn't look up as Spock approached, but as before he knew instinctively who it was.

"Spock..."

"I'm here."

"Oh, Spock..." Blindly Kirk reached out to the Vulcan, silently pleading. "What am I going to do?"

Without a word Spock gathered the Human in his arms, providing the support and comfort needed so desperately. As Kirk clung to him, burying his face against Spock's chest, his grip tightened reflexively, holding the trembling shoulders, trying to stem the violent flow of emotions, yet knowing that this was the release Kirk needed.

Slowly, Spock began to talk, the murmured words providing a calming effect.

"Do not be afraid to show your feelings: your grief must have a natural outlet, otherwise you will make yourself ill if you continue to hold your emotions in check. Let the tears come - there is no need to feel ashamed or embarrassed. Soon you will feel better."

Eventually the storm abated, the sobs quietened, and Kirk sagged, limp and exhausted, in the Vulcan's arms.

"Spock... I'm sorry. I... know that life has to go on; that... what I had back there could never be, yet... that doesn't help to ease the pain... and it hurts so much..."

Gently Spock raised the tear-streaked face, his dark eyes meeting and holding Kirk's gaze.

"Trust me. Believe me when I say that the pain will fade. Oh, do not misunderstand me - remembrance of what has happened will always remain with you, but eventually the memories will recede further into the background of your mind, become blurred with the passage of time."

"You mean that?" Kirk whispered.

The reply was soft. "Jim - when have I ever lied to you?"

"Never."

"Then I am not about to start now." Carefully, Spock released himself

from Kirk's grip, easing him back onto the bed and drawing up the coverlet.

"Try and rest now. Call me if..."

"No!" The involuntary cry had escaped from Kirk's lips before he had a chance to suppress it, and desperately he caught at Spock's hand.

"Spock... please... stay with me. I... don't want to be left alone tonight. As long as I know you're here... with me... Please, Spock... don't leave me alone..."

Silently Spock resumed his seat, sliding his arm protectingly around Kirk's shoulders.

"I won't leave you - I promise that as long as you need me, I shall be here."

Kirk felt relief flooding through him. Now he knew, without question, that everything would be all right. Spock had promised - and he always kept his word.

Slowly the heavy-lidded eyes began to close, and the lines of pain around Kirk's mouth seemed to soften. With a tenderness almost surprising in one so strong, Spock brushed away the remaining tears from Kirk's cheeks, and at the touch, light though it was, the hazel eyes opened.

"Spock... my friend... you're always here when I need you," Kirk murmured sleepily. "What would I do without you? You're always here to pick up the pieces..."

Before Spock could begin to think of an answer, Kirk was asleep.

Very carefully, so as not to disturb Kirk, Spock eased himself into a more comfortable position before leaning over to switch off the light. He was tired, but rest could come later - much later. He had promised Kirk that he would stay with him, and this was one promise he had no intention of breaking. If his presence would enable Kirk to sleep easily, secure in the knowledge that he was not alone - so be it.

The next few days would be difficult, but already Kirk had taken the first hesitant steps on the road to recovery - it was a journey which would not be undertaken alone.

As long as Kirk needed him - he would be there.

THE FINAL PARTING

There are no words...

That which I have feared most,
Which has haunted my dreams,
Is reality...

And there are no words.

Bones fears for my sanity,
He has good reason.
All my powers of control
Cannot dim the pain...

Yet there are no words.

You taught me so many things,
Perhaps you should have taught me how to cry,
Against this day...

For there are no words...

Except...

"Jim, I love you."

Ann Smith

REFLECTIONS IN A DISTORTING MIRROR by Sheila Clark

The Bridge crew tried, not wholly successfully, to avoid staring at Kirk as he stamped angrily into the elevator. Only Spock seemed to have noticed nothing wrong; as he moved easily to the command chair he looked as relaxed as he always did - as relaxed as if there had in fact been no hysterical outburst from the Captain. Yet he had been its immediate target. Nor did anyone know what had caused it.

Damned Vulcan! Kirk thought to himself as the elevator slid downwards. Always interfering, always thinking he knew best... all he was after really was a Captain's berth. Oh, he'd been clever; he'd almost fooled Kirk - the Human snarled to himself as he recalled how nearly he'd been fooled. To imagine that a Vulcan could, would give friendship to a Human... Oh, Spock had been clever, all right! It had been flattering to believe that he could win a Vulcan's friendship - and of course, Spock had played on it.

But he had seen through Spock's trickery in time to save himself. Funny how the events during the last landing on the planet they were still orbiting had made him see the truth.

The events on the planet had made him see the truth... yet... he could not remember what those events had been.

His lapse of memory puzzled him for a moment - then he shook his head, dispelling the fog of uncertainty that enwrapped him. It didn't really matter how he'd found out; all that mattered was that he had found out.

The elevator doors slid open; he strode out, nearly bumping into McCoy as he went.

"Can 't you watch where you're going, Doctor?" he snarled; and he pushed past McCoy without paying the startled surgeon any further attention.

McCoy stared after him as he went, wondering what the hell had got into Jim.

He wondered even more later when, in the rec room, Kirk pointedly ignored Spock and himself and instead moved to sit alone. Scotty began to move towards him but stopped, discouraged by Kirk's unfriendly attitude, his unwelcoming scowl. He hesitated for a moment, then veered over to join Spock and McCoy.

"What's biting the Captain?" he asked casually as he sat down.

"We don't know," McCoy told him.

"Oh. Maybe he's feeling a bit under the weather."

"He shouldn't be," McCoy grunted. "He had his routine physical a couple of days ago, and he was fine then."

"So what's put him out of temper?" Scotty risked a sideways glance at Kirk, who still sat glaring menacingly at his unoffending coffee cup; then he glanced enquiringly at Spock.

The First Officer returned the look blandly as Scotty added, "Ripped up at you, I heard..."

"The ship's grapevine is remarkably efficient at passing on information. For a non-telepathic race, the rapidity at which you ~~make~~ it work is... outstanding. It never fails to amaze me," Spock commented, not very helpfully.

"Maybe so," Scotty agreed. "But it didn't manage to tell me why he got on to you..." He looked curious.

"That's a good question, Scotty," McCoy put in. "Trouble is, none of us have an answer to it - except Jim," he added as an afterthought.

Scotty stared from one to the other. "You mean... Spock, don't you know why he was angry?"

"Correct, Mr. Scott. One moment everything was normal; the next..." His eyebrows flew upwards in his Vulcan shrug, then his face resumed its normal impassivity as Kirk got up and stamped over to their table.

"How the hell can I run an efficient ship when all my senior officers waste all their time gossiping?" he demanded harshly.

An abrupt silence fell, echoing dully through the room, as the crew members there realised just how accurately the grapevine had reported on Kirk's state of mind. One or two of the more timid decided to run no risks, and slipped out.

"Captain, we are merely taking the length of break advised for senior officers in Starfleet regulations," Spock said calmly. "I am not due to return to duty for another 6.3 minutes; Dr. McCoy still has 9.8 minutes, and Mr. Scott has only just arrived."

"I don't care what Starfleet regulations advise, Mr. Spock. If I say you're taking too long, you're taking too long regardless of what Starfleet says. Return to duty immediately - all of you." He glared round at the crewmen who had remained in the room - several more had decided that discretion was the better part of valour and had also slipped away before the Captain, in his current bad mood, noticed them.

"Jim..." McCoy began.

"Doctor, I have tolerated your... informal... attitude long enough. As from now, you will treat me with the respect that is my due as Captain of the Enterprise."

He gave every indication of having exercised considerable self-control to speak even so mildly; Scotty's jaw dropped in blank amazement at this proof of Kirk's sudden aberration; the other two, who had already seen manifestations of it, were better controlled.

"Certainly, sir," McCoy said tightly. "However, I am exercising my medical authority to insist that you accompany me to Sickbay for a checkup."

"Are you in league with Commander Spock, trying to have me declared unfit for duty so that he can take my position, Doctor?" The voice was liquid ice.

"No, Captain. No-one is in league against you. But the fact that you think we are proves that you need an examination."

"I will not submit - Traitor...!" he managed to gasp before he collapsed, felled by Spock's neck pinch.

McCoy gave the unconscious Captain every test he could, then continued with the others when Kirk regained his senses, trying as he did so to avoid looking at the undisguised malevolence in this stranger's eyes. At last, McCoy straightened.

"Thank you, sir," he said quietly, trying to pretend that everything was quite normal. "The tests show you as being perfectly all right..."

Kirk got up without a word and marched out; his step could almost be called defiant.

"... unfortunately," McCoy finished, speaking to the closed door.

Kirk muttered irritably to himself as he marched back to the Bridge, considering as he went just what to do about those two conspiring near-mutineers. He was forced reluctantly to abandon his first urge to throw them both in the brig. A still sane corner of his mind kept reminding him that they were within their rights in insisting on his having an examination. This reasonable memory

kept annoying him. He wanted to punish them, those two whose presence so disturbed him. He wanted... yes, he wanted to strike them, to whip and torment them, to hear them crying out for mercy... but that sane part of his whispered,

//If you do that, they will declare you unfit for duty... the rest of the crew will back them up... you must wait...//

Wait. The word was anathema to him. Why should he - the Captain - have to wait for anything? He was Captain; he should have the power of life or death over his men.

But that small whisper in his brain kept repeating, //You must still obey those rules, made by weaklings afraid to be bold, lest you lose your chance. Wait. Be patient. Your chance will come. Then you will be able to wield the power that is yours.//

Wait. He was tired of waiting. He thought of the myriad opportunities he had wasted, the many times he could have exercised his strength, the strength of a Starship Captain, and had refrained; the many men he could have seen cringing at his feet, acknowledging his power, if he had not foolishly chosen to permit them to think themselves as good as he.

As good as he? Weaklings. Weaklings all. And those men, his senior officers. Not one of them was worthy of the name of senior. They allowed themselves to love - yes, even the Vulcan, who could have been an excellent second-in-command to him if he had been true to his breeding - already he had forgotten that he had earlier distrusted that love.

No leader could afford to love - why had he been so slow to realise that? Hate and distrust. Those were the only emotions for a leader. Trust no-one. Make them fear you... then the power of command would taste sweet. To know you held a man's life in your hands, and that his life depended solely on your whims...

How long must he wait?

Then, with a smile almost of anticipation, he realised that he didn't have to wait so very long. For these men, his false 'friends', he could find an answer now.

GET THEM DOWN TO THE PLANET!

There, he could disarm them, having stunned them; leave them as prisoners there. He could torture them there before he left them, and Starfleet would never know.

He smiled cruelly, already hearing the screams of anguish in his mind, savouring them. It would be particularly interesting to see how much pain the Vulcan could suffer in silence. It would be extremely pleasant to find his breaking point... let the doctor, the meddling quack, watch... knowing that his turn would come. It would be a sweet revenge for that enforced, unnecessary, meddling examination.

The elevator door slid open; with an effort he controlled his expression before he stepped onto the Bridge. Wait. Just a little longer. But not for too long now.

Uhura looked up from her console. "New orders from Starfleet, Captain," she said, her voice showing some constraint. Until she knew how Kirk was going to react, she had every intention of stepping warily.

"Well?" he snapped irritably.

"We're ordered to leave the investigation of this planet, and go at once to Epsilon Eridani III; they're having trouble again with the breeding migration of the giant 'spiders', and want us to go and destroy this year's batch."

"Again?" Kirk muttered disgustedly. This was the eighth time a Starship had been called on to defend the colonists there from the migrating predatory 'spiders' - so named for the Earth species they closely resembled - and the

second time the Enterprise had been assigned the duty.

Normally, a native species would be protected in case of damage to the world's ecology; but here it had been established that no lasting harm would be done if the creatures were wiped out; there were several other species, less dangerous to the colonists, that would fill the ecological niche the 'spiders' would leave; but the only practical time to destroy them was when they swarmed to breed, since only then were they present in large enough numbers to make the effort worthwhile. It was a distasteful task at the best of times, and Kirk found himself less than enthusiastic about obeying the order. In his present state of mind, the idea of mass slaughter appealed to him... but not the mass slaughter of mindless creatures too stupid to know, even, that they were being killed.

Then a light gleamed in his eye. It would have disquieted any of his officers who had seen it; but none of them did. This was his chance!

"Very well, Lieutenant," he said briskly. "Dr. McCoy, Mr. Spock and I will beam down to continue the survey here; the Enterprise can return for us once this lot of 'spiders' has been eliminated."

And by that time, he added to himself, I'll have dealt with those two meddling bastards! "Call Mr. Scott to the Bridge," he continued. "And tell Dr. McCoy and Mr. Spock to report to me in the transporter room."

By the time he had given Scotty his orders and reached the transporter room, he had regained full control of himself. He was even able to appear cheerful as he gave the order to beam down.

McCoy's last thought as he shimmered out of existence - temporarily - was that, normal as Jim now appeared to be, there must still be something far wrong, as nothing had happened that could possibly alter his state of mind. Indeed, the change of orders would ordinarily be enough to account for a passing irritation...

When they materialised, he discovered how right he was. As soon as he could move again, Kirk whipped out his phaser.

"Now, you mutinous dogs!" he growled, a fierce note of anticipation in his voice. "There's no-one here to help you. I can deal with you properly here!"

"How do you propose to explain your actions once the Enterprise returns?" Spock asked coolly.

Kirk smiled wolfishly. "An attack, Mr. Spock. An unexpected attack by a savage animal. Both of you killed, alas!" He managed to infuse a mocking regret into his voice. "While I, fortunately for me, was a little distance away, and totally unable to reach you in time to assist you."

"No-one will believe you," McCoy said. "Everyone knows that if that happened, you'd die too trying to reach us."

"Not if I was so far away that the animal was gone again before I could get there," Kirk purred, savouring the joy of destroying their hopes of talking him out of his pleasure.

They looked at each other, anxiety in both their faces. This wasn't the Captain they knew and loved, but a sadistic stranger who resembled Kirk facially - but only facially. The worry they had felt for him on the ship now crystallised into fear. What had happened to him?

He raised his phaser to fire - and a voice interrupted him.

"You have done very well, Captain Kirk. But now, I will see to them."

All three jerked round to see the viciously cruel face of a man who stood watching. Kirk's mouth opened to protest at this intrusion - how dared this stranger interfere, deprive him of the satisfaction of punishing his men - but

the cold eyes flashed icily at him and he knew he had met his superior... and then he remembered. Yes, this man was his superior. It was he who had shown him the truth...

"Yes, Var Hyla." The name rose easily from his memory.

Spock and McCoy glanced at each other again. One question at least was answered now. Kirk had obviously encountered this man before; and it must have been during the hour, the bare hour, in the course of the last landing when they had separated in order to cover as much ground as possible in the time available. Kirk had indeed seemed slightly... absentminded... on his return to the beamdown point, McCoy remembered, even though his strange behaviour hadn't started until they returned to the ship.

Var Hyla moved forward. Although he walked towards them - nothing more - there was something menacing about his attitude - or was it just that they were afraid because they knew he had done... something... to Kirk's mind?

Once more they looked at each other. Kirk's phaser was still pointed implacably at them. If they moved they would be stunned at least, and still suffer whatever was in Var Hyla's mind to make them suffer, in addition to the unpleasantness of being stunned. For the moment they were helpless - and of necessity, accepted the fact. They waited uneasily.

Var Hyla stopped in front of them, being careful not to block Kirk's view of them. He looked from one to the other. Then, ignoring Spock, he turned his attention fully on McCoy.

The surgeon tried to avoid the basilisk stare; he tried to look away, but his gaze was attracted, caught, as a moth is caught by the attraction of a bright light. The brilliant, merciless sparks of ice blinded him; in a last frantic effort to remain himself he closed his eyes - in vain. He could still see the eyes even through his closed lids, or so it seemed. A distant voice was speaking; he could not distinguish the words, but only the meaning of what was said. His eyes opened, almost of themselves; he looked openly into the shining red eyes facing him, acknowledging his master. Then he turned towards Kirk. He walked over and stood at his Captain's side, facing Spock.

The Vulcan allowed no sign of his inner disquiet to show. McCoy's face also now showed the vicious malevolence that shone in Kirk's eyes; and although Spock had no way of knowing the meaning of the words that had been spoken, he could guess well enough what had been said. Then Var Hyla turned to him.

He gathered his self-control round him like a cloak, willing himself to remain unaffected by Var Hyla's influence. If it was pure hypnosis, he reflected, he stood a chance; if the hypnotism was allied to telepathy, the best he would be able to manage would be a stubborn resistance that would inevitably be overcome. He tried not to think of that, of the possibility of defeat. He had to remain himself. Only by doing so could he hope to help Kirk - help McCoy. For a moment he toyed with the idea of pretending to be overcome, then abandoned it; Var Hyla would surely know.

He chose to resist openly; to meet icy stare with defiant stare instead of trying uselessly to avoid the alien's gaze as McCoy had done. That had been the only defence McCoy could use, and it had served at least to show Spock the futility of it. Every nerve was strained to resist the hypnotic lure of Var Hyla's weasel-like attraction. For a moment he felt his control slipping; he fought to regain it.

Jim! he thought to himself. Jim needed him unaffected, even though for the moment he didn't know it. So did Bones. The thought gave him added strength; it was Var Hyla who closed his eyes in defeat. But the defeated reaction was only momentary. Var Hyla looked directly at the men he had overcome.

"He is yours," he said cruelly. "He is no use to me as he is. Do not damage him seriously, or incapacitate him. But within those limits, do what

you wish to him."

Kirk smiled viciously, vindictively; McCoy's eyes blazed in sudden hatred. They looked at each other, willing to share Spock's pain now that both were subject to Var Hyla.

"It will be interesting to see how much pain he can endure in silence," Kirk said calculatingly. McCoy's face darkened with an answering pleasure.

Spock drew a deep breath, preparing himself to suffer in silence whatever they chose to do to him.

But in fact there was little they could do, here. They were in fairly open country, rolling grassland with only a few trees dotted here and there giving shade from the burning rays of the sun - a sun slightly more vicious in its radiation than his home sun.

But one thing they could do, and they did it at once. They stripped off his uniform and fastened him out spreadeagled naked on the ground, tied to sticks they hammered into place with stones, tied by means of his own shirt ripped into strips. Within a very short time, he knew, his body would begin to burn; the tender, normally protected skin of his abdomen, groin and thighs in particular, the insides of his upper legs... and there was nothing he could do to prevent it. He could block off the more unpleasant sensations, but that would not prevent him from being extremely badly burned; so badly that it would certainly weaken him.

Var Hyla sat in the shade of a tree and watched, his eyes glowing with pleasure.

Spock ignored him. He paid no obvious attention to Kirk and McCoy either, but he was very aware of them and what they were doing. They were collecting thin twigs now, and fastening them together into two bundles, using more material from his uniform to bind the bundles together. Then, satisfied with their handiwork, they also chose a nearby tree and sat in its shade, not speaking to each other, just watching Spock, anticipation in both their faces.

After a while McCoy got up lazily. He moved over to Spock and examined the soft, burning skin, its tint deepening rapidly in the intensity of the sunlight, grunted, and moved away again. Spock heard him say clearly, "A little longer yet for full effect, I think," as he sat down again beside Kirk.

More time passed. Var Hyla didn't seem to mind waiting; Spock wondered why, then realised it was probably worth it to the man; he hoped that this treatment would weaken Spock so that he would be amenable to hypnosis.

McCoy came over to him again. This time, he passed an ungentle hand over the sunburned skin, watching Spock's face intently as he did so. The Vulcan's face remained impassive, but something seemed to satisfy McCoy.

The doctor glanced over at Kirk. "I'd say he's ready."

Kirk picked up the two switches and came over. He handed one to McCoy. They stood, one on each side of him, and alternated lashing him across the normally sensitive, now hyper-sensitive skin of his abdomen and thighs, the insides of his legs and groin. It was impossible to block out this pain. After the first few strokes, Spock concentrated only on maintaining a decent self-control. He would not cry out! He was only half aware of Var Hyla coming close, sadistic pleasure on his face.

After a while Kirk tired of the chosen target and struck out at Spock's chest, under his arms, and across his shoulders - another place where the sun had struck him particularly badly. McCoy copied him; soon the entire front of Spock's body was a mass of weals, many of them bleeding green. He had long ago lost count of the number of lashes they were giving him, but still he remained silent.

They seemed tireless, apparently intent on leaving no part of his body that they could see unmarked. It was Var Hyla who eventually stopped them.

"Enough," he said. He stared down at Spock, while Kirk and McCoy put their heads together, discussing what they could do next if Spock was returned to them.

Spock's lips were tightly set as he stared back at Var Hyla. Oddly, he found that the pain, far from handicapping him, was actually helping him to resist - in much the same way, he realised, that pain helped him to concentrate, to come out of a healing trance. He saw the surprise in Var Hyla's face at the ease with which he continued to defy the hypnotism, and knew that the alien had no idea that his own cruelty was helping to defeat him.

Var Hyla turned back to Kirk and McCoy. "You may continue."

Between them they picked up a large flat stone, and carried it over to Spock. Carefully, they placed it across his lower abdomen. It was heavy; the weight of it pressing on the twig-cut, sunburned flesh was agonising. Spock tightened his lips and forced himself to relax, knowing that if he tightened his muscles it would hurt all the more.

Now they were bringing more stones, which they placed on top of the flat one, building them up carefully. There was a limit to the weight his body could possibly support, he knew, and put his trust in Var Hyla's order to them not to damage him seriously. But before they stopped bringing more stones, he fainted from the pain - still without uttering a sound.

He regained consciousness inside a dark room. From having been unbearably hot, lying as he had been in the full glare of the sun, he was now shivering with cold. There was nothing he could find to wrap round himself; his best efforts to control his shivering met with only limited success - and the very shivering was agonising. He was stiff, partly from the beating and partly from lying unmoving for so long; every movement was an effort, a fight to keep from giving in to pain.

He forced himself to explore the room, conscious of a certain feeling of... of what? Satisfaction? Satisfaction because he could see quite clearly, even in this exceptionally dim light, because of the keenness of his Vulcan eyes? Illogical! He went round the room twice before he decided that there was definitely no way out.

He sat down again, shivering, unable even to wrap his arms round himself because of the pain the attempt caused him, thinking over what had happened.

Var Hyla's hypnotism had created a mirror image of himself, Spock decided. Either that or it simply reversed the normal behaviour pattern of his victim - which in this case - these cases - produced the same effect. A mirror. A distorting mirror. He had captured Kirk and McCoy... but why? What did he want?

The sensors had indicated no intelligent life on this planet, only a scattering of animals; so Var Hyla could not possibly be native to this world. This room he was in had to be a cave, but a cave altered and adapted for use as a home - and a prison. And it had been done so cleverly that he had been completely unable to find a doorway. Come to that, where was the light, dim as it was, coming from? There was no obvious source.

He alone was unaffected by Var Hyla's warped mind, but he was imprisoned beyond any hope of escape. And the Enterprise would not return for some days. When she did, Kirk, under Var Hyla's influence, would betray his crew - Spock had no doubt of it. He had to find a solution before the Enterprise came back. Had to. And he was a helpless prisoner, both of the cave and of his tortured body.

The pleasure Var Hyla had gained from Spock's soundless agony was now

dissipated; he wanted more. But he realised that in the Vulcan he had met his match. He would not attempt to weaken the prisoner further, at least not by the use of pain; he would wait, rather, for the lack of food to do the weakening for him. It was long since he had watched men writhing in agony to satisfy his whims; his hypnotic gift had been the first indication of a dominant mutation on his home planet, and while he alone had it, his mind, twisted into insanity by being the only possessor of such a gift, had learned to enjoy pain in others as a clear manifestation of his powers.

Once others had been born with the gift they had easily combined forces to overcome him; and they had marooned him here, on this world, with all he needed to live out his centuries-long life span - but the very solitude, the one thing about which they could do nothing, had warped his twisted mind still more.

He wanted company; needed company; but now he wanted it only to watch his companions writhing in agony, to hear them pleading with him for mercy. He wanted the crew of the Enterprise for that, and only that. He would not kill them, or damage them too severely; he wanted them to recover so that he could torment them again... and again... and again...

He looked now at his two hypnotised victims. A dribble of saliva trickled from the corner of his mouth as he wondered which of them to select, his mouth watering at the thought of the pleasure the man's pain would give him.

No... not yet. A little anticipation first, to whet his appetite. There were really so few practical ways of torturing a man here; whipping was almost the only one. Another whipping would be... not boring, exactly, but certainly lacking in savour. Let these men think up new ways of tormenting their fellows - then turn those methods on them. Meanwhile...

He made his way towards the cave where Spock was held. A little gloating, perhaps - let him realise just how fully he was in Var Hyla's power.

One of the phasers lay there on the carved rock table. Var Hyla picked it up. Then he made his way towards Spock's prison.

The Vulcan was lying on his back, prone, his eyes shut. Var Hyla moved cautiously over towards him. He seemed to be unconscious, but the alien was wary. Even when his captor was right beside him, however, Spock made no move, gave no sign of awareness. Var Hyla allowed himself to relax.

He bent over the limp figure, feeling for a heartbeat. He hadn't miscalculated, surely, permitted his other prisoners to overdo the torture? There was no trace of a pulse...

Var Hyla put the phaser down and bent closer to the Vulcan. Immediately he found himself caught in an iron grip. He tried to cry out, but the merciless fingers gripped his throat, effectively preventing him from uttering a sound. How could the prisoner have so much strength yet? he wondered. He should have been almost helpless from weakness.

Without relaxing his grip for an instant, Spock pulled himself painfully to his feet.

"You will take me to my friends; then you will release them. Or you will die." Spock's voice was as coldly implacable as Var Hyla had ever heard, colder and more vicious even than Var Hyla had ever felt. He made a sound, grunting deep in his throat, as he tried to speak. Spock released his grip a fraction, just enough for the alien to say chokingly,

"I can't. I can only... hypnotise. Not cancel it."

Spock almost released the man in his shock. He had never for a moment thought that the alien couldn't undo his evil; all hypnotists he had ever encountered were able to cancel out the effects of their minds afterwards. Or - was this a trick?

He forced Var Hyla forward, out of the door so cunningly hidden that he hadn't been able to detect it. There was only one passage; the prison was right at the end of it. Spock suspected that it was originally designed to be a store of some kind.

He forced Var Hyla along, the alien tripping and stumbling, unable to watch his footing because of Spock's hold on his neck, choking and gasping for air - but Spock resolutely refused to relax his hold again. While Var Hyla was actually a prisoner, he could perhaps do something - he didn't yet know what. But once the Enterprise came back, he could get Kirk and McCoy beamed up, then beam up himself, leaving Var Hyla behind, and interdict the planet. Then, perhaps, he could use a mind meld to help his friends. But it would be a long, exhausting wait.

They entered a large, well-lit cave. Kirk and McCoy were there - gripping at their necks as Var Hyla was grasping Spock's wrists, gasping for air, clearly feeling all that Var Hyla was feeling. His first guess was right, then; they were reflecting the distorting mirror of Var Hyla's character.

Var Hyla choked, trying to speak again. His victims seemed to understand; they moved, albeit slowly, towards Spock and his prisoner. Spock nodded to himself. Of course. Var Hyla had ordered them to release him. Grimly, Spock tightened his grip still further. He saw the agony of suffocation on the faces of his friends, but his anxiety for them gave him the strength to resist the urge to stop doing what made them suffer. If this suffering could somehow help them... by weakening Var Hyla, perhaps... he could find out whether or not the alien was bluffing when he said he couldn't release them.

Kirk was beside him now, reaching out for Spock's throat. As his Captain's hands closed around his neck, Spock tightened his grip yet more on Var Hyla. He had to make the alien unconscious. Then, perhaps, he would see how the others were affected. He dared not spare a hand for a neck pinch.

Var Hyla choked, and slumped. Kirk's hands slid from Spock's throat. McCoy fell unconscious.

Spock checked that Var Hyla was actually unconscious - he wasn't going to be caught by his own trick. But he was senseless, so Spock left him and turned towards Kirk. Then he turned back. Var Hyla was dangerous. Spock looked round, saw the switches that had been used on him, and crossed to them. He ripped the cloth strips from them and used these to tie the alien. Then he used the man's cloak to wrap round his head, effectively preventing him from using either his eyes or his voice, although there was nothing he could do about his thoughts.

He shrank from using a mind meld on this vicious being; but he did not shrink from using one on Kirk. At least, not at first. Then the full impact of Var Hyla's personality hit him.

Spock shuddered, repressing a desire to vomit. The mass of cruel sadism that filled Kirk's mind, echoing Var Hyla's, was almost unbearable. He began to pick a fastidious way through the mess of bloodstained memories, trying to find Kirk's own personality.

And failed.

He could find no trace of Kirk... no indication that the personality he knew so well, and had even come to love despite all his attempts to remain untouched by what he felt were his Human emotions, was there - had ever been there. There was only the vicious reflection of Var Hyla, mocking him.

Sadly, but without any real reluctance, he withdrew, and spent several moments simply breathing, recovering from the horrors he had experienced at second - no, at third hand. Gradually, his efforts were successful, and he regained full control of his rebellious mind. He paused to consider what he could do now.

McCoy was as useless to him as Kirk; indeed, probably more useless, since

he was, as Spock knew, a more apt subject for hypnotism than Kirk. He had in all probability absorbed even more of Var Hyla's wickedness than Kirk... unless, being an easier subject, less effort had been needed to overcome him.

Spock was disinclined to investigate. He was weakening. The strain of trying to control the pain he was suffering, the strain of trying to mend his injured without going into a trance, were both draining his strength; the fight with Var Hyla had weakened him, and searching for Kirk's mind had almost exhausted him. He could not afford to waste any more strength.

Therefore, there was only one thing he could do. He had to meld with the alien. And he shrank from such contact.

Even as he still hesitated, Kirk stirred and sat up. McCoy was only a second behind him. Var Hyla himself didn't move, but Spock knew he had to be awake if his echoes were. In this, at least, the alien was vulnerable.

Kirk pushed himself to his feet, reaching for Spock's throat again, his face threatening. McCoy scrambled up too.

Spock caught Var Hyla's throat once more. "It is easy to choke you again," he whispered.

There was menace in his voice too; Var Hyla, the expert in vicious threats, recognised it. He shook his head, unable to speak, and Kirk moved back to join McCoy. Both sat down again, watching intently, ready for the slightest indication from their master that they could attack.

Keeping one hand at Var Hyla's throat, Spock felt over the material surrounding the alien's head. He wasn't going to risk uncovering any part of that head, even although melding through the cloak was not going to be easy.

It was with a decided effort that he ignored Kirk's muttered curses directed at him, the insults, the foul language, knowing that this was all an attempt by Var Hyla to discourage him. He set his lips firmly; without realising it he held his breath as he plunged his mind into the cesspool that was Var Hyla's.

He dived through memories of blood, struggling deeper into the warped mind with as much distaste and effort as if he was, in fact, swimming through an ocean of the blood Var Hyla had shed or caused to be shed over the years.

He fought his way through memories of cruelty, trying to plough his way through them to memories of childhood, to the innocence that must surely have been there. He fought through conscious memories, memories of bodies writhing in agony, and learned that Var Hyla considered his own suffering to be in the nature of a hors d'oeuvres before the real agony that the alien planned to make Kirk and McCoy inflict on him.

He shuddered away from consciousness of what was planned for him, and delved deeper, into subconscious memories now. Memories of petty cruelties, so slight they weren't worth remembering, to memories of bloodbaths so horrible that even Var Hyla himself shrank from remembering them. Mothers forced to mutilate their own children, knowing what they were doing but powerless to resist; the curses of one of those mothers, for once frightening him and making him choose to forget... and worse.

Spock shrank from wakening those memories too, realising that he was on the wrong track. He was searching the wrong part of Var Hyla's mind. It was different from the other minds he had known; the memory centres were differently arranged. He plunged deep into another part of Var Hyla's mind. And then another.

And then at last he reached the childhood memories. Innocence? Spock read the petty cruelties perpetrated on animals, cruelties that rapidly became less petty and more vicious; of schoolmates who cringed in fear, trying in vain to avoid the sadistic being who was their contemporary and with whom they therefore had to associate. He read the hatred Var Hyla felt for those boys; hatred because he was different from them and wanted to be the same. He read the hatred

Var Hyla felt for his parents, manipulating them in revenge because his heredity from them was to be different. Even his earliest memories showed consciousness of that difference.

There was no innocence that Spock could reach. Shuddering, he withdrew to think.

If he was to release Kirk and McCoy from Var Hyla's influence, he had to do it here. He had to find the hypnotic centre of Var Hyla's brain and try to destroy that. There was no other way. If he killed Var Hyla - and he was rapidly coming to the conclusion that that was the only merciful thing to do to the alien - Kirk and McCoy would die too, linked to Var Hyla as they were.

He needed time to relax, to prepare himself for what he knew would be a terrible struggle. But he could not relax with Kirk and McCoy ready to pounce on him as soon as the threat to their master was no longer imminent. A quick neck pinch dealt with that problem.

Spock straightened, wincing as the movement hurt his tormented muscles. He touched his fingers to his temples, readying himself. It would be his only chance. If he failed, Var Hyla would win; and he could guess what would be the outcome. Torment for them all; for Kirk, for McCoy, for himself; and for the crew of the Enterprise too. Torment so that Var Hyla could enjoy his power... and try to forget that he was different, and in his difference, feel his inferiority.

Ready now, as ready as he could ever be against this evil, he felt his way back into the twisted mind.

It was less of a shock this time - he knew what to expect. He began to probe for the brain centre he needed.

Even unconscious, Var Hyla could make his influence felt... at least on the mind exploring his. As Spock sent the tendrils of his mind deep, he was aware of a fierce resistance. Var Hyla knew that his best weapon was the memory of suffering; he threw at Spock the dregs of his conscious memory; but his very evil helped to defeat him. For in the subconscious depths of his mind Spock had already seen things worse than anything Var Hyla could consciously remember.

One channel after another came to a dead end. Spock felt himself tiring. Var Hyla stirred; Spock realised he was regaining consciousness, and pinched his neck again. But he couldn't go on much longer; and the convolutions of the alien's brain seemed more complex than any Spock had ever encountered before. There was so much of the brain left to explore, to search...

Spock took a deep, weary breath. Doggedly, he probed on. He had to win...

At last, when he had begun to feel that he was finished, when only his obstinate nature was managing to keep him going, he found what he sought. Now all he had to do was discover how to destroy it.

Var Hyla moved again. Spock stunned him again. Then summoning the last of his strength he drove a fierce, concentrated thought at Var Hyla's mind, a thought compounded of all the emotions he denied that he ever felt; a thought of goodness, of love, and the willingness to sacrifice everything, including life itself, for others. He felt the shock in the alien's mind as the thought struck him; and the very shock of the emotions so contrary to everything Var Hyla had lived for broke through his defences.

Kirk and McCoy rolled over in momentary agony, then relaxed, freed from Var Hyla's influence; and Spock, having succeeded in what he set out to do, withdrew quickly as he felt his senses waning.

He regained consciousness to find himself lying comfortably, his head pillowed on something soft. Gentle hands were stroking his body. He opened his eyes, looking up.

He was lying with Kirk supporting his head. McCoy was tending his body, smoothing something cool and soothing over the cut and burned flesh.

They were all right, then. He closed his eyes in relief, but opened them again quickly as he heard Kirk draw his breath in sharply, as if in pain.

"What is it, Jim?" he asked.

Kirk looked down at him, shame in his eyes. "You can bear to speak to us? After what we did to you?"

"You didn't do it," Spock said. "Var Hyla did. You are... all right now?"

Kirk nodded. "Yes. But I remember... too much."

"In a little while - when I feel stronger - I will help you. You too, Doctor."

"I'll be glad of it," McCoy admitted, continuing unceasingly to smooth the balm he had found among Var Hyla's possessions over Spock.

"What of Var Hyla?" Spock went on.

Kirk glanced over to where a limp body lay.

"He's alive - just," McCoy said. "He's conscious, but he doesn't seem to have any mind left. We risked unwrapping his mouth, but he doesn't seem to remember how to talk, even. So we just left him while we saw to you. We wouldn't have bothered about him at all, only I wanted to ask him about these ointments, what exactly they were for, but this seems to be a useful all-purpose one. We thought that since you'd defeated him, he'd be fairly harmless... but he's even more harmless than we expected."

Spock looked inquiringly at Kirk.

"We felt what he felt," Kirk explained. "We knew what he knew... though not in complete detail, thank goodness. We felt his horror at your presence in his mind, and the pain of the weapon you launched at him. We felt his weakness as he let us go." He shivered, remembering; then put his hand gently on Spock's forehead for a moment. "Thank you, my friend."

By the time the Enterprise returned they had established that Var Hyla's mind had indeed gone. He had as much knowledge as an infant.

"Perhaps he can be given a second chance to live," Spock said quietly as they stood studying the figure on the Sickbay bed. "Many of the cruelties he perpetrated were buried deep because even he could not bear to remember them. There must have been some good in him somewhere, only it never got the opportunity to emerge."

"But where is he to get that chance?" Kirk asked. "We dare not let him go free in case he does recover to be as evil as before."

"I suggest the asylum on Elba II, Captain," Spock said. "He will be safe there, yet well looked after."

Kirk nodded. "I think you could be right, Mr. Spock."

Kirk looked round the Bridge contentedly. To the crew, he had suffered a temporary spell of bad temper; they knew nothing more. To the crew, Var Hyla was a man they had found on the planet; a man insane through loneliness, whose history no-one would ever know. Let it stay that way. He met Spock's eyes, and smiled his gratitude and affection. The Vulcan's face lightened for a moment, a moment so brief that Kirk knew anyone else catching it would wonder if he had imagined it. But Kirk knew he had not. He swung back to face the screen.

"Take us out of orbit, Mr. Sulu. Ahead warp factor one."
